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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

VOLUME XLVI NUMBER 3 AUTUMN 1993

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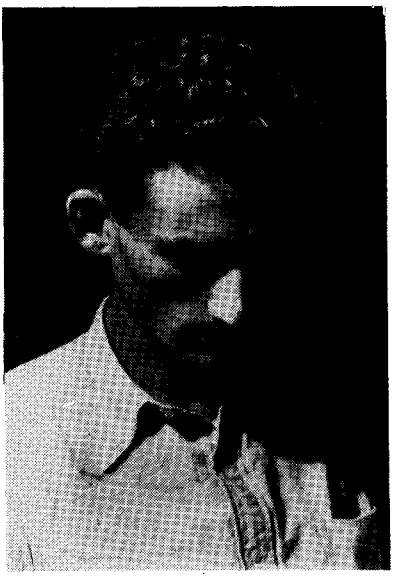
Collected Poems

Edwin Rolfe

Edited by Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks



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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

In her review of my *Mysteries of Paris and London* ("Obscure Romantics and Uneasy Victorians," Spring 1993), Susan Balée objects to what she regards as "obligatory name-dropping." "In the first four pages of Maxwell's book, including notes, the professor refers to no less than 53 people" (whom she then lists, in a long, long catalogue). "These are far more people than you need for a crowd scene in an epic; they are far too many for the first four pages of a book, even a scholarly study of prodigious scope." There's a little slippage in the argument here to which I'd like to call attention, partly because it irks me but also because it suggests a curious (and perhaps unnecessary) gulf between belles-lettres and scholarship. Looking through the first four pages of *Mysteries*, I find not fifty-three but twelve names. That's three names a page. The others Balée mentions are in the notes—not, incidentally, to the first four but to the first nine pages of the book. She does say "including notes," but then that qualification drops out and the fifty-three cursèd names are said to occur in those virtually unimaginable "first four pages."

How eager should one be to satirize scholarship? There's nothing like working in a university to tempt one in this direction. I, too, would like to believe that I am made of finer, more delicate, more altogether sensitive and poetic stuff than those inky, conformist career-builders who linger in the groves of academe, dropping names obligatorily. Then again, I'm making a hard argument about allegory and city life, an argument requiring me to link three or four orders of knowledge that don't normally occupy the same space. People who are interested in Dickens usually aren't interested in Hugo, *hélas*! And people who (miraculously) have read both of them generally don't know beans about the transformations of allegory between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries. Big footnotes might be in order here. They might even (I hesitate to mention the possibility) have exercised a persuasive influence upon Balée, who accepts my argument with generous and intelligent equanimity—even while continuing to complain about name-dropping.

A century or two ago, scholarship and belles-lettres went together. Walter Scott, an extraordinarily popular writer all over the world in the nineteenth century, wrote dozens of books with long, learned notes. The ones to "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" occupy about as much space as the poem. They are full of recondite information; they were read for fun as well as profit. I will conclude by recommending

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Jerome McGann's essay, "The Dawn of the Incommensurate," which contains these words:

> What's in a footnote, that it should have achieved such a bad eminence? Why does "History" use them or need them, and why should poetry, that immortal thing, also find itself, from time to time, covered with their dust? These may appear trivial, dare I say pedantic, questions. Raising them, however, brings one directly to the central issues of all literary work and literary study.

Read McGann's essay to find out how he substantiates this claim.[1]

Valparaiso, Indiana Richard Maxwell

Susan Balée replies:

I hate to quibble with Mr. Maxwell's quibble, but I have to stand by my figures ("Just the facts, Ma'am, only the facts!" to quote a Dickens character). *The Mysteries of Paris and London* (post-preface, acknowledgments, and epigraph) begins on page 3, which is where I began my count. I stopped counting at the end of page 6, and notes 1–13 fall in those pages. Anyone who wants to check my addition can simply do what I did and mark every name; he or she will come up with a catalogue of references numbering in the fifties. (I managed to miss the reference to Spenser in note 6, and those to Pascal and the ubiquitous Stephen Greenblatt in note 9, so my initial figure is actually *too low*.) Since the notes to the pages cannot be separated from the pages (aren't we supposed to read them as we come across them?), I'm afraid that Mr. Maxwell's roster is not "virtually unimaginable," but all too dauntingly *visible*.

I don't see any slippage in my own argument, but I am curious to know what Maxwell means by "the curious (and perhaps unnecessary) gulf between belles-lettres and scholarship"? I guess I'm not sure what he means by "belles-lettres," an elegant French phrase that once distinguished literary writings from scientific prose, but that now, in these dog days of theory, tends to be mouthed as an insult. A "belletrist" nowadays connotes a dabbling dilettante rather than a scholar. In his first reference to this phrase, Maxwell seems to imply that book reviews in *The Hudson Review* are an example of "belles-lettres," whereas the academic book reviewed is an example of

[1] Jerome McGann, "The Dawn of the Incommensurate," in *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 50–72.

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"scholarship." This is a dangerous dichotomy, since most of the reviewers for the *HR* are themselves scholars. For my part, I hold a Ph.D. in English from Columbia University, where I studied Dickens with Steven Marcus and criticism with Jonathan Arac; I also have a degree from the Université de Dijon, where I studied Hugo, Balzac, Zola and Flaubert. Not surprisingly, I write scholarly articles as well as reviews and personal essays.

But Maxwell's own definition is slippery, for when he refers to "belles-lettres" a second time, he links the phrase to Walter Scott and seems to make it synonymous with imaginative writing. And he's right that Scott's notes are learned, though I wouldn't call them "recondite." Scott wrote for a popular audience, whereas Maxwell's book is obviously directed only to scholars; his footnotes don't explain so much as point readers to yet other sources. To pick a representative example, what would a nonacademic reader make of this last line of the second footnote: "Marx's ideas about commodities and alienation are pertinent here; so are George Simmel's studies of urban life"? That's fine for another scholar or your dissertation sponsor, but it's bewildering to a less specialized reader. My beef with Mr. Maxwell is that he doesn't try harder to make his *very good* ideas accessible to readers outside the academy. On the contrary, his formidable wall of references positively excludes such an audience.

Hélas, I too wish that there weren't such a gulf between belles-lettres and scholarship! I certainly wish that scholarship in literature had not become so arcanely theoretical in the last twenty years. In our attempt to be more scientific in our approach to literature (and therefore to have more of a *raison d'être* in an increasingly practical society), we are destroying our own profession. Scholars talk primarily to other scholars; undergraduates can barely enter the discourse, and lay readers are utterly lost. Who needs a "Department of English" when we are speaking other languages—the languages of Marx, Foucault, Jameson, and Lacan? When professors at the best schools care less about teaching than about esoteric research? When metacriticism is becoming more important than *literary* criticism; when authors don't matter; when texts are only filters for "political work"; when creativity *n'existe plus*? If Mr. Maxwell finds me harsh on scholarship, particularly his own, it's only my *fin de siècle ennui* coming through.

One of the great ironies of the current academic scene is the huge amount of rhetoric devoted to "equality" in the canon while, at the same time, academics in their research could not be more elitist. How egalitarian can we be when we publish books that no common reader can comprehend? That's my biggest complaint with contemporary criticism, and I do not mean to direct it simply at Mr. Maxwell, whose *Mysteries* also has so many good points. Indeed, to him I say: *pax vobiscum*.

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Comment:

The Century of Titian

I OVERHEARD AN ODD COMPLAINT as I left *Le Siècle de Titien*, last spring's dazzling, not-to-be-missed exhibition in Paris. "The title is misleading," a distinguished type in an Hermès tie insisted peevishly. What had he expected? *Le Siècle de Titien*, referred to as "the Titian show," was admittedly neither a Titian retrospective nor a complete survey of sixteenth-century Italian art, nor even, strictly speaking, a comprehensive view of sixteenth-century *Venetian* art. But the sumptuous array of cinquecento pictures in the Grand-Palais offered an illuminating vision of a particular aspect of painting in Venice during the years, roughly, of Titian's activity. (Born sometime between 1488 and 1490, he died in 1576.) According to its organizers, the unifying characteristic of the work in the exhibition was its response to the "modernism" proposed by Giorgione at the beginning of the century, then developed by the younger, but far longer-lived Titian as the 1500s progressed.

What defines Giorgione's "modernism," his "maniera moderna"? His rejection of the small scale, the rigidity, and the proliferation of naturalistic detail that was the legacy of the Gothic tradition—and endured in Northern Renaissance art—in favor of the generous proportions, soft-edged forms, and Platonic geometry of a new, lyrical classicism. His clients' appetites for references to the antique and to humanistic values led him to expand his range of themes, from the religious subjects, allegories, and portraits for which he had first become known, to "profane" scenes from mythology and antiquity. But what was most forward-looking, and as it turned out, most influential about his approach was a new softness of modelling, a new luminosity of color, and a molten quality of light and shade—the very things that distinguish Venetian cinquecento painting.

While lauding Giorgione's originality, the curators of *Le Siècle de Titien* are quick to point out the sources for his new manner of painting. Much of the thesis is stated in the catalogue essays by Alessandro Ballarin—a name from the Veneto—who is described in the introduction as "playing a pioneering role in the reclamation project that has allowed us to clear out the underbrush of the problem of Giorgione-Titian-Sebastiano (before more underbrush grew up again) . . ." (I promise that I am not mistranslating.) According to Ballarin, the development of Giorgione's modernism owed much to a remarkable conjunction of diverse masters in Venice, when he was a very young painter. Around 1495, when Giorgione was seventeen, both Perugino (Raphael's teacher) and the Northerner, Albrecht

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Dürer were there, and Ballarin believes, Hieronymus Bosch—certainly some Bosches were in circulation—not to mention such native Venetians as the Bellinis and Vittore Carpaccio, among others. Initially drawn to the "Neo-Gothic" manner, Giorgione was decisively directed toward "modernism" when he encountered first the work of Leonardo da Vinci and later, according to Ballarin, Leonardo himself, when he was in Venice in 1500. Ballarin sees the modern Giorgione as beginning then, in "the period when Giorgione entered into the problematic raised by Leonardo in his works and above all in his writings and, very probably, by the discussions between the two artists." (It's an indication of Ballarin's own modernity that he gives such weight to the influence on Giorgione's formation of Leonardo's words, both written and possibly spoken, rather than his work.)

The dates of Giorgione's alleged encounters with Leonardo's art and theory provide the basis for Ballarin's chronology and even his attributions, but whether or not you subscribe to this version of events, it is clear that something changed radically in Venetian painting at the beginning of the 1500s. An intensified lyricism and a heightened awareness of ideal geometry were wedded to an idealized, but closely observed view of nature; the result was a new fusion of figure and landscape, revealed and united by golden, form-softening light. The legacy of this approach are paintings like Titian's celebrated mythological subjects, where light-struck human beings dominate a hazy sunset landscape. Even religious themes were presented with new economy and sensuality. So powerful was this new conception, the organizers of *Le Siècle de Titien* maintain, that it affected even the last works of Giovanni Bellini, the most senior and most respected painter in Venice at the time, the surviving member of a dynasty that had included his brother, Gentile, and his brother-in-law, Andrea Mantegna. The curators compare Giovanni Bellini's relationship to a generation of younger Venetian painters, some his students, all his admirers, to that of Manet with the younger artists later known as the Impressionists. Manet, they say, "caught up at the end of his life with the younger plein air painters who had recognized in him a model twenty years earlier, and then became an Impressionist." The aged Giovanni Bellini, they declare, reacted similarly to the exciting new notions proposed by his young associates, which accounts for the full forms, pellucid light, and economy of his last works, in contrast to the "Neo-Gothic" sharp-focus and multiplicity of his earlier paintings.

Le Siècle de Titien began with a small group of late Bellinis and works by members of his circle similarly affected by "la maniera moderna." This was followed by a startling number of paintings, mostly portraits, optimistically attributed to Giorgione; thereafter Titian dominated, with impressive groups of his pictures compared at intervals to those of his followers. The exhibition's thesis demanded the exclusion of Giovanni Bellini's near-contemporary, Carpaccio, since although he lived through the first quarter of the "century of Titian," he was

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unaffected by "giorgionism" and remained set in his "Gothic" manner. The artists who responded most directly to the challenge offered by Giorgione's new lyric vision were presented in glorious abundance and depth: Titian, Sebastiano del Piombo, Palma il Vecchio, Lorenzo Lotto, Il Pordenone, Veronese, Jacopo Bassano, Tintoretto, and more, for a total of 279 paintings, drawings, and the occasional print. Certain paradigmatic pictures were of necessity absent, works that one longed for either because they would have reinforced the point, or because they were terrific, or both, but there was no shortage of either the typical or the outstanding. The stunning array of works by key figures of the period, innovators and followers alike, provided a splendid context for unfamiliar pictures and suggested new relationships between familiar ones.

The exhibition purported to define Giorgione's style and to rethink both sequences and attributions accordingly. The convoluted arguments for revisions of dating, reattributions, and related scholarly wrangles are set forth in the exhibition's catalogue, a daunting object a good two inches thick, arm-wrenchingly heavy, and too unwieldy to be read without being spread on a table. The color illustrations are dingy, while the essays are, for the most part, pretty ponderous and, it seems, often open to dispute. But the entries for each of the nearly three hundred works in the exhibition are testimonials to dogged research and scrupulousness, with exhaustive lists of references, thoroughly documented provenances, and detailed summaries of past and current views of each work. What they and the essays reveal above all is the astonishing instability of opinions about Italian art of the century of Titian. Long-standing questions are far from being answered, even with decades and sometimes centuries of scholarship, connoisseurship, and technological investigation brought to bear. The shifts in chronology and attribution offered by the organizers of *Le Siècle de Titien* should make tempers flare in art historical circles for some time to come.

But what of the show? Since I'm not a specialist in sixteenth-century Venice, it was easy to forget such thorny issues and concentrate on the pictures themselves, to measure them, aesthetically and emotionally, against each other. The lesser works by lesser painters both emphasized Titian's excellences and bore witness to the pervasiveness of his influence. The impact of the best Titians, the fascination of seeing unfamiliar pictures for the first time, the delight of seeing familiar ones newly revealed by cleaning, were, of course, among the chief pleasures of *Le Siècle de Titien*. Yet it was perhaps most illuminating to see how the painters of the very first rank of the second order fared in the context of their colleagues, to see who managed to absorb a "giorgionesque" approach, yet remain an individual, and who, having mastered a few crucial "moves" soon subsided into mannerism.

The possibility of this kind of direct comparison is the point of a show like *Le Siècle de Titien*. The medieval iconic quality of Giovanni Bellini's last works, for example, was revealed by seeing them near the

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more informal, naturalistic Giorgiones—if they were Giorgiones—but the sheer range of even the less disputed pictures made them hard to pin down. The Venetian tradition of Mantegna, Bellini, and Carpaccio, along with Florentine *sfumatura* and rigorous geometry, plus a new dramatic intensity were all evident, often in the same picture. Of course, this apparent response to diverse possibilities supports Ballarin's theories—or else contradicts them; either way, the variousness of the "Giorgiones" was noteworthy. The Accademia's admonitory portrait, *La Vecchia*, provoked other questions. Still compelling despite its ruined surface, the picture seems to anticipate Gericault's series of so-called *Madmen*. Did he see the painting during his long sojourn in Italy?

If you ignored the perennial question of young Titian-Giorgione, the character of both the young Titian's art and that of his contemporaries was clarified by seeing them together. His rival, Sebastiano del Piombo, looked especially impressive, so that you wondered what Titian's own history might have been, had Sebastiano not left Venice for Rome in 1511, a year after the field had been cleared for younger artists by Giorgione's early death. But where Titian's figures move easily in space, turning to one another with large gestures, as though light, shade, and air were palpable substances supporting them, Sebastiano's seem jammed together illogically. In the show, the exceptions were four male saints in a setting of the latest in classicizing architecture, intended for San Bartolomeo di Rialto, and now in the Accademia. Bathed in cool light, framed by elegant niches, they were distinguished by their spatial potency; perhaps their isolation helped.

Titian's early works are set apart, too, by his delight in a virtuoso rendering of textures—finely gathered linen, velvet, silk, armor, fur, and more. The miraculous coexistence of paint and reference of his later years has not yet declared itself, nor his distinctive touch, the bold stroking with "a brush as big as a broom" that so fascinated visitors to his studio and helped him to stake out a territory apart from what he called "the fine manner" of his rivals. (Does this justify assigning *Le Concert Champêtre* to the young Titian?) In the context of the exhibit (and the memory of the Villa Borghese's early Titian, *Sacred and Profane Love*, that icon of magnificent female nudity and equally magnificent fashion), the massing of forms, the modelling, the landscape of this mysterious image of two elegantly clad men, studiously ignoring two nude women, made the suggestion seem plausible. But the color seemed unlike, with its golden tonality, its warm lights pulled out of darkness, at the expense of chromatic invention. But is this simply a factor of condition and the passage of time?

There are fewer questions about the mature Titian, just astonishment at the resonance and power of his works, the breadth of his grasp. In the Louvre's *The Crowning with Thorns*, which anticipates most of seventeenth-century painting in its clash of weapons and limbs, and its downstage violence, every part of the surface becomes charged, dynamic, expressive. Paint itself, in these pictures, begins to

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take on some of the freight of eloquence that it will have in Titian's last works. Eventually, it will all but subvert anecdote and take on a surprising burden of narrative, but in these middle years, illusionistic detail is still accorded an important role, making Titian's lingering debt to Bellini and his Venetian forebears clear. The Louvre's newly cleaned *Virgin with a Rabbit*, for example, places a group of figures, casually disposed in the modern manner, in a setting embellished with almost medieval minutiae: plants, flowers, a woven basket of fruit, and that enchanting bunny; it's so delightful that you almost forget to decipher it as religious symbolism.

But we must pay attention to narrative in these paintings. Part of Titian's mastery lies in his ability to present intense, complex, provocative, and deeply felt meanings in the guise of "pure" painting. The Prado's seemingly "decorative" *Venus, Cupid, and an Organ Player*, for example, is full of conceits, the way formal gardens of the period were full of water surprises. The musician skews round to stare at the naked, bejewelled goddess, apparently unaware of him and focused on Cupid. Or has she provoked him, by touching the small of his back with her foot? The gorgeously painted allée of trees in the background frames the organist's head, pulling the viewer's eye away from the goddess's belly, where the musician's gaze is riveted. Not to mention the added seduction of flesh against velvet and crumpled sheets, and the gleaming organ pipes that transmute into soft, retreating trees. The dominance of the organ pipes suggests endless possibilities, too, for English-speaking feminist and semiotic critics, but that's another matter. What's more interesting is the way the picture begins to have a double existence as reference and as paint; illusionistic velvet appears at once plushy, and dryly brushed, just as armor, in other pictures, is at once smooth, shiny, and roughly painted.

In Titian's late paintings, this fusion of materiality and meaning is even more intense, creating a powerful contradiction: as the paintings become more declaratively physical, as touch, color, and paint texture become more independent of illusion, the more spiritual and disembodied the paintings appear to be. Light seems to emanate from the canvases, eventually functioning as an abstract, expressive element liberated from naturalism or anecdote.

It's this degree of abstract feeling that even Titian's most gifted followers usually failed to equal. As the show made clear, they often relied on exaggerations of pose and compression of space in their quest for the intensity of Titian—what we describe as "Mannerism." Only Tintoretto, through the force of sheer *painting*, sometimes achieved some of the ferocity, if not the passionate introspection of his master. Others, like Bassano, literalized Titian's spiritual luminosity, providing explanations for otherworldly effects by the presence of torches or fires. Certainly, in the context of the exhibition, Veronese acquitted himself best, unabashedly taking Titian's sensuality as his point of departure, without apology or subtext. The best Veroneses

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were decorative in the highest sense of the word, their ample forms enlivened by mouth-watering color: sienna, dull orange, rose, and faded crimson, set off by blue-greens and green-blues.

All in all, *Le Siècle de Titien* was an impressive show, but nothing quite came up to the mark of the best Titians. Most fascinating, perhaps, was to watch him surpassing himself, rethinking, for example, the classicizing *Entombment*, now in the Louvre, of his middle years, with its symmetrical figures and elegantly arcing body of Christ, and transforming it into the late version, now in the Prado, where a terribly dead Christ sags into the corner of the canvas, lowered into the tomb by figures at once as massive as anything in Giotto and as weightless as pure light. The Louvre's painting, with the head of Christ cradled and sheltered by enveloping shadows, is about passionate feeling and the body; the Prado's picture is purely about passionate feeling.

The exhibition held, for me at least, one major surprise. I had expected to be (and was) mesmerized by the terrible silence and calm, the bleached, murky color, and the urgent, unstable brushwork of *Marsyas*, as I have been every time I've seen it. It's frightening and beautiful, its horror enacted in silence, without protest, as Apollo kneels to strip the skin from the hapless satyr who dared to challenge a god to a music contest. At once dense and about to fall apart, *Marsyas* is deeply disturbing—perhaps the greatest failed picture of all time.

What surprised me was the way the half-length *Ecce Homo* from the St. Louis Art Museum pulled me away from *Marsyas*. It's a puzzling picture; mood, palette, and method—the solemnity, the creamy rose-greys, silvery tonality, and loose paint handling—are typical of Titian's last years, but the tight cropping and packing of the figures harks back to Mantegna and Bellini. The picture depends upon contrasts of asceticism and indulgence, bare flesh and extravagant clothing, a spiky crown of thorns and a caressing, befurred hat with a lavish jewel. It's an uncomfortable picture, formally, as well as thematically, like *Marsyas*. Elements detach, held in place only by the unifying power of color and touch. A smiling girl, holding Christ's bonds, is wedged into the corner; Christ turns away and inward; the plump sybarite who calls us to witness holds up his hand, ring on thumb, and bars passage into the picture. That fleshy hand, emerging from a fur sleeve, is the most meticulously painted part of the picture. Totally of this world, it begins, paradoxically, to look like a sign for the Crucifixion.

I'm certain that the St. Louis *Ecce Homo* would have compelled and rewarded my attention, wherever I had seen it, but to come upon it among other masterpieces from Titian's last years, in a context that documented his origins, his evolution, and his influence, made the painting even more potent. That's justification enough for *Le Siècle de Titien*, pace the gentleman in the Hermès tie.

KAREN WILKIN

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

Horse and Sea Horse: *Areopagitica* and the Sea of Stories

> The mind, that ocean where each kind
> Doth straight its own resemblance find. . . .

Unless we keep a strict watch on it, the mind is always creating odd couples. Yet the Renaissance theory of correspondences was wearing away even as Marvell wrote, seventeenth-century poetic liberties already on their way to redefinition as license. These days we keep our similitudes under stricter control, at least in critical prose. At most, we might concede that John Milton's *Areopagitica* and Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* are more alike than urchins and sea urchins, sea cows and cows.[1]

Yet when entities float into contact, however casually, the resemblances ask to be interrogated. Something intervenes—we may if we wish call it logocentrism—to organize drift, to limit wandering or forbid it, imposing on such watery relaxation the relentless apparatus of exposition, argument, evidence. Compare and Contrast.

"[T]he point of a comparison," in the words of Barnet and Stubbs's widely used freshman composition text, "is to call attention to the unique features of something by holding it up against something similar but significantly different. If the differences are great and apparent, a comparison is a waste of effort."[2] This is scarcely an encouragement to couple oddly.

[1] Rushdie discusses *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta Books in association with Viking, 1990) in interviews with Martin Amis ("Rendezvous with Rushdie," *Vanity Fair*, Vol. 53, No. 12 [December 1990], 160–163) and James Fenton ("Keeping Up with Salman Rushdie," *The New York Review of Books*, March 28, 1991, 26–34). His reviews of Grass, Calvino, Paley, Carver, and Barnes are in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (Granta Books in association with Viking, 1991), where his Herbert Read Lecture, "Is Nothing Sacred?" is also collected.

[2] Sylvan Barnet and Marcia Stubbs, *Barnet and Stubbs's Practical Guide to Writing*, Fifth Edition (Boston, 1986), p. 51.

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Why not leave *Areopagitica* and *Haroun* where we found them, securely settled into their respective centuries and categories, rather than forcing ideas, times, figures into reluctant pillow talk in one Procrustean bed? It is not productive, suggest Barnet and Stubbs, to compare blueberries and elephants.

Or lovers and compasses? We may suspect no pairing would occur, even in the mind's feckless ocean, if the nature of the pair did not in some way support it. Which is not, however, to say it will support the insistent demands of the expository enterprise.

It is true that both *Haroun* and *Areopagitica* are pleas for intellectual freedom. Yet the differences are so great and so apparent that we'd better get them out of the way, before we go back, as we shall, to drifting. For what has floated this couple together is something less apparent than a similarity of subject matter. A similarity of mood—I might almost say of ethical mood—is not so easily interrogated. A squirt of oceanic fluidity may be called for; if we stay long enough at sea, we may draw enough water from our metaphor to blur the inky edges of our categories into shades of feeling, in the hope that a strained comparison will come to seem less strained, less blueberry and elephant than horse, at least, and sea horse.

Areopagitica, then, is the kind of writing that begins like this:

> They who to states and governors of the Commonwealth direct their speech, High Court of Parliament, or, wanting such access in a private condition, write that which they foresee may advance the public good. . . .

Whereas *Haroun* begins like this:

> There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. It stood by a mournful sea full of glumfish, which were so miserable to eat that they made people belch with melancholy even though the skies were blue.

Areopagitica's title page proclaims its genre. If we aren't learned enough to know what went on on the Areopagus, we are told at once: we are to read this as an oration, *A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing*. *Haroun* is a tale. *Areopagitica* is addressed to the Parliament of England. *Haroun*

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is addressed to a child. An oration, addressing the nation's highest authority, must take itself extremely seriously. *Haroun* can't take itself seriously at all. *Areopagitica* has a single, concentrated purpose, to advance the public good, such a purpose and such an addressee requiring linear, sequential argument. *Haroun* has multiple purposes, not all specifiable, but the most urgent being a father's need to reclaim a closeness to his son, a closeness brutally shattered by a difference of opinion about the value of free speech; such a purpose and such an addressee requiring—a story.

> Z embla, Zenda, Xanadu:
> A ll our dream-worlds may come true.
> F airy lands are fearsome too.
> A s I wander far from view,
> R ead, and bring me home to you.

Opening the book, the child solves the riddle and discovers his name.

Back in another life, while Rushdie was finishing the book that, in his own phrase, "handcuffed [him] to history," the child told the father that it was "wrong that I didn't write books that children could read." He would allow Rushdie to finish *The Satanic Verses* on condition that the next book would be for him. "That was the deal." Zafar was nine when history intervened.

His book had to be as different from *Areopagitica* as we can well imagine. It had to be lighthearted. It had to be playful. It had to be crammed with adventures and surprises and jokes and puns, like the stories the master story-teller used to tell him in his bath, that he could tell him no longer. "I had to keep this promise to Zafar because it was the only thing I *could* keep to him. . . . There's no more absolute thing than a promise to your child."

And there were other, more desperate reasons to play, to play as hard as he could, to play, as Frost would have it, for mortal stakes. Handcuffed to history, enveloped in "a sense of absolutely overwhelming failure," "I couldn't have written a grown-up novel. I didn't have the distance, the calm." Only his promise could provide the energy to "do something as weird as write a fairy story in the middle of a nightmare."

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> You write out of what you think is your best self, the best there is in you. If the upshot of that is that the whole planet thinks of you as a complete bastard, you wonder what it's about, what it was for, and why do it. I spent an awful lot of time thinking I would never write again, not because I couldn't but because I didn't want to. . . . I thought: I don't want to be a writer any more. I would like to be *not a writer*.

Shah of Blah, Ocean of Notions (the nicknames he would give to Rashid Khalifa, Haroun's storyteller father), Rushdie must *play* his way out of that ruinous sadness, lest writer and reader drown in a sea of glumfish and belching melancholy. The genre of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, like the genre of *Areopagitica*, was determined by addressee and purpose.

Milton's approach to his subject must be as explicit as he can make it, if he is to advance the public good. Zafar's father's must be as little explicit as he can make it, if he is to keep his promise. When Rushdie was interviewed on "60 Minutes," Mike Wallace, sounding rather pleased with himself, put forward a neatly allegorical reading of *The Sea of Stories*. Immediately, crisply, Rushdie replied: "I resist that reading completely." *Haroun* is a tale. Even to call it a parable is too much. It must have, as they say, no designs upon us. Zafar will not read it to advance the public good, or even to comfort his father. He must read it for fun.

So the Ocean of Notions concocts a story of a boy, and a father, and a sad city which is and is not Bombay, and a princess, and a dream city at war with a dark Cultmaster of Silence, Arch Enemy of Language, Foe of Speech, who is plugging up the Wellspring that renews the Sea with the rainbow Streams of Story so he can poison it into cold sterility. The Shah of Blah's story streams are plugged up too, for Haroun has asked his father a question so terrible that it takes the heart right out of him: he "stood up in front of a huge audience, opened his mouth, and found out he had run out of stories to tell." Haroun sets out to save his father from silence. He manages to do it, aided by a passel of friendly birds and fishes halfway between Dr. Seuss and Farid uh-Din Attar, and to save the dream city, and save the princess, and unpollute the environment, and save his own sad city too. As Rushdie summed it up to James Fenton: "A terrible thing happens to a

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father, the child blames himself and wishes to rescue the father." And he ends up rescuing "not just the father, but the whole world, while he's doing it, and why not?"

Why not? We can all give hosts of reasons. Happy endings today are hardly acceptable even in children's stories. Paddling among the glumfish, we have learned to distrust the prosperous outcomes so generously accorded us by earlier streams of story. Yet here is Rushdie exerting himself play by play into a triumph of will and desire, creating a happy ending too elegantly, joyously complicated to examine here, even if we were glum enough to spoil the story. But it's an ending that will say, to his son and himself, what must be said: that melancholy is controllable, that there are ways out of sad cities for energy and activity to find. "Yes, well I wanted to write a happy ending. I've never written a happy ending. I thought: Go for the whole thing, the whole catastrophe. . . . And it was . . . *actually*, it was lovely to write."

But can even a child believe a happy ending? "*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*" This is the terrible question that has infected Haroun, and whose black poison can pollute even an ocean of stories. It isn't his own question, though he can't stop asking it. Rushdie frames his plot to make sure we know where he got it: from the glum, suspicious world of adults.

It is a question the adult world will not relinquish, so in time we shall drift back to it, and with it issues of happy endings and truth. For now we return to the joyless necessities of summary. The question that has silenced Rashid Khalifa is a product of the sad city. It tells his son that "life is not a joke shop" and "all this fun will come to no good." In his dream adventure, Haroun will hear it all again from the Cultmaster of Silence, as he tells the boy to stick to the bleakness of Facts. What's the use of stories? asks the dictator. "An Ocean of *Stories* is an Ocean of Trouble."

What, in fact, is the use of a sea awash in heteroglossic plurality, "made up of a thousand thousand thousand different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity"?

> Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still

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> in the process of being invented could be found here, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library in the universe. And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories, and so become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive.

The Sea washes us back to Milton, and not a moment too soon. The exigencies of exposition exert their authority even over drift. *Areopagitica* is laid out to meet the same exigencies, with its *first*, *next*, and *last*, first the relevant history, classical and modern, next "what is to be thought in general of reading," last and at most length, the demonstration that the Parliament's Order "*that no book, pamphlet, or paper shall be . . . printed, unless the same be first approved and licenced*," will be "primely to the discouragement of learning and the stop of truth." But it is not the argumentative structure, however solid, that determines our experience as we read. The arguments are there, and the assemblage of evidence—*Areopagitica* is detailed, learned, and long. But what readers remember are rather the great oceanic waves of eloquence:

> As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? . . . I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure . . . which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guyon, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain.

The waves of *Areopagitica* are the waves of the sea of story. There is the story of Adam, to whom when God gave reason he gave the freedom to choose, "for reason is but choosing," and from the rind of whose apple the knowledge of good and evil,

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"as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world." There is the story of Psyche and the impossible pile of seeds she had to sort out, a task no more difficult than the sure discrimination of good and evil. There is the story of Isis searching for the scattered pieces of Osiris' body. There is old Proteus; there are dragon's teeth. And here, in the passage that everybody knows, there is the temperate knight Guyon, and the preference of *The Faerie Queene* to the orderly exposition of Scotus and Aquinas.

These are the fluid streams, combining and recombining, that Milton has swum in since childhood. It is not his light-minded Allegro but his Penseroso who reads by night, after his sessions with Plato and Greek drama, tales "of Forests and enchantments drear, / Where more is meant than meets the ear." Milton would have no difficulty locating those streams in Rushdie's Ocean, his own Princess Rescue Story among them. There are, in fact, so many Princess Rescue Stories that the Eggheads of Gup City, on Earth's dream moon Kahani (which means "story"), keep track of them by number. There will be a number in Gup for the *Mask* written to be *Presented at Ludlow Castle* (and acted by children), in which Platonic and Theocritean and Christian streams mingle in Renaissance liquidity—as Zafar's father, in his own liquid medium, mingles a Princess Rescue Story which must surely be from the Thousand and One Nights (Number S/1001/ZHT/420/41(r)xi) with streams from a twelfth-century Persian's *Conference of the Birds* and a nineteenth-century Englishman's *Alice in Wonderland.*

It is that vital liquidity which is in constant need of defense, and sometimes of rescue—the life of books, of words, of ideas, combining and recombining in fluidity and freedom. What Rushdie's tale hints to Zafar is the same thing Milton's oration tells the Parliament of England. The living ocean of notions, for dictators, is an ocean of trouble. "The world," says the Cultmaster, "is for Controlling. . . . And inside every single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world . . . that I cannot Rule at all." Carried by the surge of their common theme, Rushdie's language joins up with Milton's. The mind's Ocean is uncontrollable by tyrants; it is *not dead but alive.*

> For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as the soul was whose progeny they

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> are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively and as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth.

Life, potency, activity; efficacy, liveliness, vigor, productivity; the living intellect—terms that, explicit in Milton's Oration, are everywhere implicit in Rushdie's Rescue Story. That vigor will propel the figure through change after change. Milton is not known for playfulness—another great and apparent difference between our couple—but an extended metaphor is a kind of play, here even a miniature story. Twenty years later Milton would no longer feel like playing; metaphor in *Paradise Lost* subsides into the sobriety of epic simile, even that to be largely foregone in *Paradise Regain'd*. But in *Areopagitica* his language is still exuberant. The play of life against death continues to elaborate. The stakes are high, though not yet as literally mortal as Rushdie's. "As good almost kill a man as kill a good book"—in this context the sentence takes on an excruciating applicability.

But there's more life ahead. "A good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." The metaphor builds and intensifies. "The seasoned life of man" is "preserved and stored up in books." To spill it is "a kind of homicide, . . . sometimes a martyrdom"; even, "if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre."

Mortal stakes indeed. Milton's was a world that contained the Index Expurgatorius and the Inquisition, as Rushdie's contained and still contains the Ayatollah Khomeini's death sentence. Books were burned; so, sometimes, were people. They were also hanged, drawn, and quartered. And though in 1644 Milton could write in safety, and hope and for a time believe that Cromwell's armies would lead the way to a "knowing people" of prophets and sages, even Cromwell would be unable to impose full religious toleration, and in sixteen years the knowing people would call back the king and it would be at the risk of his life that Milton would publish his last pamphlet written to advance the public good. A year later Andrew Marvell, rather than writing about oceans and gardens, would be exerting his influence to save his former employer's head.

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Other similarities are floating out there; if we drift further we will bump into them. Generic barriers seem to dissolve when the subject is freedom, and the emotion a devotion to the book that amounts to passion. "I grew up," wrote Rushdie in the Herbert Read Lecture that he could not deliver for himself, "kissing books and bread." The convictions that bring together two such different personality types—for what we know of Milton is very different from what we know of Salman Rushdie—are potent enough to reach across centuries and genres to evoke a common figuration.

It is a powerful force indeed that draws such separate entities into a shared imagery of cold, of ice, of frozen stasis. Rushdie's Sea is warm and full, brimming with life. The Prince of Silence's realm is "an ice-wilderness on which the sun never shines." When Haroun finally confronts the Cultmaster, Khattam-Shud (whose very name means "completely finished," "over and done with"), it is to hear him proclaim the coming death of the Ocean, "when black ice freezes over its surface," and the world goes mute.

"The world is for Controlling," says the Cultmaster. Ice is what came to Milton's mind in 1644 as he contemplated the "obedient unanimity," the "gross conforming stupidity," the "dull ease and cessation of our knowledge" to be anticipated from a safely licensed press. England would be locked in as "staunch and solid [a] piece of framework, as any January could freeze together," "a stark and dead congealment . . . forced and frozen together," "triple ice clung about our hearts." "What should ye do then?" Milton asks the Parliament. "Should ye suppress all this flowery crop of knowledge and new light sprung up and yet springing up daily in this city?"

Darkness and frozen conformity; warmth and liquidity and light. Flowers, too; the surface of Rushdie's Sea is alive with water-gardens, imported from the floating gardens of Kashmir. We might almost imagine that Rushdie was deliberately exploring the narrative dimensions of Milton's metaphor, if the contrast were not so natural and common. Nature sets life against death, flowers against a January freeze; writers follow. But there is more shared here than this familiar contrast. The imagery of nature does not provide cities, yet *Areopagitica* is as metropolitan as *Haroun*.

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Rushdie is a city boy, as he told Fenton, his "interest in the world . . . entirely urban," his life spent almost entirely in "gigantic cities." "To be a Bombayite," he has said elsewhere, "(and afterwards a Londoner) was also to fall in love with the metropolis. The city as reality and as metaphor is at the heart of all my work." It is at the heart of *Haroun*. From the glum city, the boy and his father dream-travel to a city "all excitement and activity," noisy with "non-stop conversation and debate," where plans are "itemized, scrutinized, rationalized, mulled over, chewed over, made much of, made little of, and even, after interminable wrangling, agreed," where the king is named Chattergy and the parliament The Chatterbox, where the army wars against Silence and is made up of Pages organized into Chapters and Volumes under a General Kitab whose name means Book. And Milton too was a city boy and a Londoner, born in London, moving from house to house there, buried there, traveling, when he traveled, not to rural beauty, but to the Italian cities which had produced so much of the literature that formed him, whose language he spoke and wrote, whose Renaissance humanism we call *civic*. In *Areopagitica* (the title itself an evocation of the Athenian civic center) what he recalls from his Grand Tour are not the leaves of Vallombrosa but his months in Naples and Rome and Florence. It was in Florence, walking up from the Duomo, that he "visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licencers thought." It was in cities that he traded poems and ideas with the Italian literati, and was "counted happy to have been born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was."

In *Paradise Lost* he will write differently, in populous city pent, compassed round with darkness and dangers and Restoration riot, true liberty lost with paradise (though he hasn't left London). But this is 1644, not 1667. Parliament's armies are fighting the King's, and winning, and London is the revolutionary center.

> Behold now this vast city, a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty. . . . The shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of

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> armed justice in defence of beleaguered Truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas . . . , others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement.

The busy hum of revolutionary London is not so far from Gup. Christopher Hill describes the "fantastic outpouring of pamphlets" that followed the lifting of censorship in the 1640s, "pamphlets on every subject under the sun, an average of three a day for twenty years, especially between 1642 and 1649."[3] These are the years which found Milton exulting in the lectures and sermons "preached, printed, vended in such numbers," as they pour from the presses undeterred by "the Castle St. Angelo" (the papal prison) "of an Imprimatur."

Imprimatur. The word alone is enough to set Milton's imagination playing. As it did in the Guppee army, its Volumes "each headed by a Front, or Title, Page," print in *Areopagitica* comes to visible life. Contemplating an Italian title page, Milton sees a cityscape, a "piazza," in which no less than five priestly Imprimaturs, "shaven reverences," are "seen together, dialoguewise, complimenting and ducking each to other" while the unfortunate author stands by wondering if he is to publish or perish. And Milton is not done with these Imprimaturs, "that let pass nothing but what is vulgarly received already." He twits the Anglican imitators of Rome, for whom English wasn't good enough but they must set down "the word of command" in Latin. They were right to do so, but for the wrong reasons. Milton knows the right one: English, "the language of men ever famous and foremost in the achievements of liberty, will not easily find servile letters enough" to spell Imprimatur. For true book-lovers, the very letters have vitality. Rushdie's book begins in the country of Alifbay, which is, being interpreted, the land of Alphabet.

If the city provides terms in which to evoke the exhilaration of freedom, there are, I think, profounder reasons than city sound and bustle. It is in cities that words are most valued, that books are printed and distributed, that they are, overwhelmingly, bought, read, and talked about. It is to cities (and

[3] Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (New York, 1961), p. 174.

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universities, which are themselves small cities) that we go for the excitement and variety of intellectual exchange, for the marvelous chatter that sends the mind on from one challenge to another. It is in the city that languages and dialects intermingle, that people crowd and irritate each other into the possibility of change. It is the city that provides the kind of experience that leads Rushdie to quote Edmund Burke's "Our antagonist is our helper," and Milton to write that "that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary."

When the talkative Guppee army mobilized against the Cultmaster of Dumbness and Muteness, the Foe of Speech, Haroun and his father wondered about its chances, given its habit of arguing "over every little detail" and debating the pros and cons of every order. They needn't have. "The Pages of Gup, now that they had talked through everything so fully, fought hard, remained united, supported each other when required to do so, and in general looked like a force with a common purpose." This is a New Model Army. Debates and arguments and openness have brought them together, while Khattam-Shud's forces of Silence, disunited, suspicious, and treacherous, mutiny, hide, desert, and lose the battle.

Milton in 1644 would not have been surprised. It was in the same faith that he exulted that the city of London, "besieged and blocked about" by the King's forces, "her navigable river infested, inroads and incursions round," was still full of people "disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, even to a rarity and admiration, things not before discoursed or written of." It is in this mood of exhilaration that he pleads with the Parliament not to suppress the flowery crop of knowledge and new light, and to put "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."

But this marshalling of kindred metaphors is making me uncomfortable. It begins to sound too much like argument, reluctant homage to the exigencies of Compare and Contrast. Argument here risks tendentiousness, suggests that there is more ice and city in *Areopagitica* than can actually be found. Argument obscures differences that at another time we might want to remember—as, for instance, the difference between Rushdie's kind of play and Milton's, between rollicking, prolif-

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erating humor and controlled polemic sarcasm. This is still a very odd couple. But I will argue still that what floats them together is more significant than what divides them. It is more than a commonalty of imagery, occasional or pervasive. Deeper than any particulars of language is the mood out of which such tropes arise, the mood of exhilaration, of energy, of activity, of hope.

I have called it an ethical mood, shying away from the ubiquitous adjective "political." But it is political, of course, and not merely in the vacuous sense in which the adjective is now applied to every utterance. It is political because it is profoundly, confidently ethical, in that it intends, in Milton's words, to advance the public good. It evokes much more than the personal importance to two brilliant writers of their freedom to publish. It is true, certainly, that no one ever found Milton inattentive to his own personal agenda; only recently he had been condemned in a sermon before Parliament for the publication, unlicensed, of his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. But though energy may come from a sense of personal grievance, a feeling from which Milton seems to have been rarely free, exhilaration will not. Exhilaration looks forward, not back. The ethical mood of *Haroun* and *Areopagitica* is enabled by its confidence (a word which shares its root with "faith"), confidence in variety, possibility, in the uncertainties and surprises of a shared, public freedom, in its slow and irregular tendency toward good. It is a confidence in everything that cold and ice are not.

I need hardly say that it is not a mood that is widespread today. Certainly it is hard to sustain for those who live in history. Milton couldn't hold on to it, having seen his revolution fail and religious persecution return; it is remarkable that Rushdie, even with Zafar's help, manages to play his way into it at all, let alone play it through to a prosperous outcome. But he does, and so we drift back, as promised, to the issue of the happy ending, and with it, truth.

It was late in 1990, almost two years into what he has called the ruin of his life, that Rushdie talked with James Fenton about the happy ending. He did not tell him only that he wanted to write it, that it was lovely to write it, but that it was

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necessary, integral to this stream of story. "They've just got to fall into each other's arms and everything is okay."

What he said struck Fenton hard. "And this," he commented, "was an example of you *exerting your freedom as an author.*" His extended emphasis is the measure of contemporary surprise. And Rushdie concurred: "I was exerting my freedom to make things turn out okay for that little boy and his dad and mum." He went further: "And I thought—you know—sometimes in life, things do turn out okay, and it's wrong of writers to deny this fact."

Such authorial freedom seems a very different thing from the political and intellectual freedom that Milton has been talking about. Yet what is less licit than a happy ending, what choice more daring for a writer, especially one who has so much better a reason than most of us to belch with melancholy? What more subversive of the current crop of received ideas than to compound so oppositional a choice with a truth-claim? And to do so with the same natural ethical language that Zafar had used, the language of right and wrong? *Wrong* not to write for children. *Wrong* to deny what is, after all, a *fact.*

Children have a right to ethical language, as to happy endings and to hope; most of us would agree to that. But Haroun is both a child and a child of our time, and though the story's almost over, the happy ending in preparation, he is still asking what's the use of happy endings that aren't even true. "The sadness factories are still in production, you can see the smoke; and almost everybody is still poor . . . " And Zafar's father will answer him: they are true sometimes, really true, and you better believe it.

A novelist is free to write fantasy, but even fantasy is grounded in reality. Rushdie's reality admits of hope. The exhilaration of possibility reaches from the personal to the public. It bespeaks a faith in the possibility of healing, not only the personal disaster of a little boy and his father, but political disaster as well. That the Guppees win the battle, that the dark ice melts away in sunshine—it is incumbent on us to remember that such things have happened. It may even happen that a sad city remembers its name and chooses freedom, opening itself to new possibilities and—of course—new problems. Even in hid-

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ing Rushdie could turn on his television and watch the Berlin Wall go down.

"And while there is life, there must be analysis, struggle, persuasion, argument, polemic, rethinking . . . "—it's not Milton, this time, who's piling word on libertarian word, but Salman Rushdie, paying tribute to Günter Grass five years before the wall came down. Admittedly the sentence's continuation is scarcely Miltonic, as Rushdie cannily deflects any accusations of rhetorical splendor by bundling up his assemblage of vital abstractions into an unpretentious suggestion of "all the other longish words that add up to one very short word." But the short word is *hope*. It is clear from the book that he wrote for his son that he would not disclaim that word, even today. Hope is a hidden, essential ingredient in any writing which seeks to advance the public good, perhaps in any writing at all. It is that short word that blends the public and the private purpose that at the outset seemed to distinguish two such separate works in two such separate genres. The purpose of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is as public as *Areopagitica*'s, and not only because it concerns freedom. For those who write to children, like those who, as Milton did, write "to the world," write for the sake of the future.

But an obstruction blocks our drift, just as the end seemed close. Are we ready to conflate the truths of the imagination with the truth of fact? The issue of happy endings is not so easily finessed. We may concede they may be emotionally necessary; now and then, perhaps, they may even occur. But how often, how typically, how significantly? Milton could believe that freedom enabled truth. Like Rushdie, he honored the underwater truths of Story. But he only glances at these in *Areopagitica*. The truth his oration concerns itself with is explicit, expository truth, the kind of truth that is claimed not in stories but in orations, in pamphlets, in lectures and sermons. And what can this have to do with the truth of a sophisticated multiculturalist celebrating pluralism in 1990?

We have encountered this obstruction already, large and capitalized, in Milton's paean to the vast city, mansion house of liberty, fashioning weapons—and Milton does not mean only metaphorical weapons—in defense of beleaguered Truth.

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Then I nudged us past its inconvenient bulk. But it's still there, unignorable. How can we associate Rushdie's flickering, provisional truths with Truth, transcendentalized with a capital initial? Rushdie inhabits the same world we do. He can, and does, cite Lyotard and Foucault and Rorty. He praises the novel explicitly as "the form created to discuss the fragmentation of truth" in a world in which (he quotes Marx) "all that is solid *has* melted into air." He elevates "the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself." How can we assimilate him to John Milton, justifier of the ways of God to men? Our coupling is coming uncoupled.

We may concede occasional brushes with truth in the Streams of Story, below the surface if not upon it. We will listen as Milton, in his Princess Rescue variant, makes the Lady's little brother (he was nine years old too) say that the Christian Platonism his elder brother has been spouting is "musical as is Apollo's lute," knowing how easily we can melt truth-claims into music. But we cannot do that in *Areopagitica*. Truth, word and idea, pervades that speech, and truth there is not music. It is "our richest merchandise." To license its import and export is strangulation, as if "some enemy at sea were to stop up all our havens and ports and creeks." And Truth brings in the tone of hope, equally obstructive: "And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licencing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter."

> For who knows not that Truth is strong. . . . She needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings to make her victorious—those are the shifts and the defenses that error uses against her power. Give her but room, and do not bind her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true. . . .

Like the victory of Gup City, this must strike unusably on postmodern ears, one more story that isn't even true. Milton could capitalize truth in 1644, but it certainly isn't possible today.

Yet the entities drift together even here. If we think a capital T is enough to make truth monolithic, Milton will surprise us. In *Areopagitica*, his temple of the Lord is not carved out of a single block, but put together out of "brotherly dissimilitudes,"

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with "many schisms and dissections made in the quarry and in the timber." Truth as the state of man now is is something searched for, not something found. It is the body of Egyptian Osiris, hewn into a thousand pieces and scattered to the winds, to be gathered up limb by limb. "We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons. . . ." Bind Truth, says Milton, and like Proteus "she turns herself into all shapes except her own." But just as we are expecting an assertion of her transcendent, unmistakable form, we are told that "yet it is not impossible that she may have more shapes than one."

Truth may be our richest merchandise, but "truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopolized and traded. . . . We must not think to make a staple commodity of all the knowledge in the land, to mark and licence it out like our broadcloth and our woolpacks." Truth is not a frozen ice-sheet; it is "a streaming fountain"; "if her waters flow not into a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition." It is this sickness that is to be feared and opposed, not the "fantastic terrors of sect and schism." For "where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making."

In that faith Rushdie created the Guppee army.

Truth, today, is a word that literary critics touch with tongs. For that very reason readers may be grateful when writers of fiction feel free to pick it up. Certainly there are uses for stories even when they aren't true; if they are fun they are useful enough. Yet everyone who has ever read a child a story (or read a story as a child) knows there's more to it than that, that children will search out their truths in unexpected places. The child who grew up kissing books and bread kissed "large numbers of cheap comics of a most unliterary nature," books about Superman and Batman and Aquaman and Spiderman. The adult, in his Read Lecture, tells why they were worth kissing, and the language in which he tells us deserves our attention. The superheroes may have been law-and-order conservatives, but "the lesson they taught children—this child, at any rate—was the perhaps unintentionally radical truth that

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exceptionality"—freaks and mutants as they were—"was the greatest and most heroic of values." There's more on those values in "Is Nothing Sacred," all worth quoting, but what will strike the postmodern ear is the untoward vocabulary: *lesson, taught, truth.*

The words carry us back to a linguistic world in which Milton—or our great-grandfathers—would have felt at home. To us, however, the once familiar landscape has grown strange. We are more at ease when Rushdie, having cited Julian Barnes's "beautiful idea . . . that 'love teaches us to stand up to history,' " adds that (though he says it's a "lifebelt" for him) he doesn't know "if this is *true*"; when he reminds us (reviewing Italo Calvino) that "story-telling is after all a nursery euphemism for lying." Yet two pages later he will be telling us that in "the most outrageous fiction about fiction ever conceived" (Calvino's *If on a winter night a traveler*) "we stumble in every paragraph over nuggets of hard, irreducible truth." "Why," he asks us, "finally, should we bother with a Calvino, a word-juggler, a fantasist?" We should bother, Calvino is "indispensable," because "he tells us, joyfully, wickedly, that there are things in the world worth loving as well as hating; and that such things exist in people, too." What can this be but a confession of faith in a proposition that Rushdie thinks is true, for Calvino, for himself, and for us?

It may be that children, and story-tellers, know things about stories that readers who come to literature through criticism forget. Rushdie, at any rate, will praise Grace Paley for the process of writing she describes as "taking out the lies," for her "determination to call things by their true names." He will praise Raymond Carver for trying to salvage from the mess he found around him, "Honesty, perhaps. Integrity. Truth." But it is in writing of Vietnam and Central America that Rushdie puts it most plainly: "It seems to me imperative" he says, that literature enter the great political arguments, imperative "because what is being disputed is nothing less than *what is the case*, what is truth and what untruth."

Milton couldn't have stated it more categorically. Our couple wash up side by side, in the same surge of ethical emotion. Though truth may have more shapes than one and we have not

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yet found them all, Lords and Commons, still it is a word, and a concept, that neither Rushdie nor Milton can do without.

It is, finally, that concept that underwrites the passionate call from both to acknowledge what books are, to kiss them, to pick them up when they fall, to acknowledge them as somebody else's precious lifeblood that can vivify our own. We can't do without books, or blood, or bread. Though "precious" is another uncommon word in late twentieth-century discourse, Rushdie, writing (like Milton) under the pressure of history, needs that one too. For when "the assumptions and processes of literature, which I had believed all free men and women could take for granted, and for which all unfree men and women continue every day to struggle," are subjected to "an attack of such bewildering ferocity," "it . . . become[s] necessary to restate what is most precious about the art of literature—to answer the attack, not by an attack, but by a declaration of love."

Out of that declaration of love Rushdie might, I think, be willing to ratify a revision of Milton's phrase, to recuperate it as something like "the precious lifeblood of our common society." For Rushdie as for Milton, books are a synecdoche for those values which free men and women all too easily take for granted, leaving the unfree to struggle alone. Those values traveled east to Rushdie's India from a small, parochial island; Milton was their first, perhaps their greatest exporter. Rushdie, migrant, inhabitant of imaginary homelands, under his own bitter constraint and sad occasion dear, claims them for himself and for his half-American child and for the world community.

Lifeblood is alive, and we can't stay alive without it. Our job is to defend its living streams and bequeath them to the world's children. The vast, warm, pullulating energy of the Sea of Story exemplifies not only the possibility but the actuality of shared knowledge and experience: Greek, Roman, Italian, English, Hebraic, Christian, if we think of Milton (even Catholic, for though he was not ready to tolerate popery, he had read the *Comedy* through); for Rushdie, the languages and legends and life of India, Kashmir, Iran; of Bombay, Delhi, Srinagar, Mecca; of London and New York—of Indian, Near Eastern, European, and English-speaking imagination, brought in the mind's ocean into mutually energizing collision and collaboration.

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Such hope as there is rises out of that plural vision. If *Areopagitica* envisages a noble and puissant nation leading Europe out of the collapse of the Universal Church into the problematics and possibilities of a free individual conscience, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* embodies the hope that out of the collapse of colonialism may be created a richer, more multiple, more imaginative society, as Rushdie's books have created a richer, more multiple, more imaginative English. It's a brave hope, gallant and moving, because it carries no promise of success, only of struggle. What Milton lived to see was True Liberty lost and his hopes in ruin. He could not guess that in 1790 they would be written into a Bill of Rights, or that by the second millennium the whole world would pay them at least lip service.

Not a secure happy ending, not an ending at all. Rushdie knows that. "Happy endings must come at the end of something," says his chief Egghead, who is cooking one up for Haroun and his sad city. "If they happen in the middle of a story, or an adventure, or the like, all they do is cheer things up for a while." But Haroun is not one of those fairy-tale characters who because they ask for too much end up with nothing. "That'll do," he says.

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LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

White Tiger and the Mosquitos

From Tortola to St. Kitts, I encounter
hard-working proud parents
of aviators: doubling up nights
and weekends—
moonlighters at those second
and third jobs—to send
their sons (today, a few daughters,
as well) to the famed school for Master Pilots
in Trinidad. My cab driver,
Guyana-born, brags about prowess
of his rugged pilot son, touting his top-of-the-line
job prospects. . . . In mid Sixties
Grenada, he tells me, careers in piloting
hit their acme.

This small nation produced more superior
pilots, per capita,
than any other country—*worldwide.*
It was, without a doubt, the *in ting* for most Grenadian
lads: *if the glamour puss*
local chicks heard that you were going to fly,
mon, you were at least halfway home with them! . . .

Tough old Captain Farfan, veteran of twice
daily non-stop flights
from London to Port-of-Spain, heads
the Trinidad
Master Classes for all pilot
trainees. The students,
he complains, are—with few exceptions—
lax and inattentive, though their roster includes
only Top Gun apprentice
pilots from aviation prep schools
throughout the Caribbean. Hah, they swerve bolt upright
in their seats when Cap Farfan
(retired Commander of the British RAF)
spins his yarns—

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mostly true, drawing on facts of his life—
about his many combat
missions flown solo over *Deutschland*
in the Great War. But they fall back to slouch and dawdle
mode whenever he resumes
the daily lessons. Since the students know him
for a sixth-generation Trini man, proud scion

of one of the earliest British settler's
families, why—he asks me—
do they fight him *every fool step*
of help's way?,
resist or repulse his sly
hard-bitten tricks
of the trade, secret knacks he learned
on-the-run, installed behind the control panels
during strafer attack missions.
Or dogfights. His whitish skin hue,
it may be, undermines his sway with them, though often
he boasts, coyly, that he pumps
20% African blood through these nose-diver
old tiger grit

loop-the-loop arteries and veins, and indeed,
to illustrate his point,
he holds his breath & chug chugs
in place until his neck and forehead veins bulge purply—
but Black is *pure Black.*
And the chaps won't settle for skin color pranks
or recessive-gene Race quibbles . . . One day, Farfan

brings his cocoa-skinned sixty-year-old
"kid" sister to class.
But nobody believes *she be same*
family kin.
For too long, they know him
WHITE TIGER Farfan,
no relenting, now, on their *bleach face*
visage of him. . . . How he loves to rehash his lowdown
on the old primitive fighter
planes he flew in The War: levers jammed,
pedals stuck, you had to get down on your hands & knees
in mid flight (putting your wheel
on an improvised hanger device, that gimmick
he'd cooked up

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in lieu of today's automatic pilot), grubbing
about, this way and that,
in the steamy rumblebox bowels
of the cockpit: kick pipes with your boot, slam floorboards
with a hammer when engines
missed a few beats—threatened a mortal stallout.
It was rather like stoking a steel smelter's blast

furnace that's lost its spark. You had to get
those pump driven pistons
going again in fractions of a sec,
or risk DEATH
DIVES: *it's no fun to bail out*
over Nazi line
encampments, let me tell you . . . Survivor
skills! You had to keep up your daily calisthenics,
so much more sinew and burly
muscle at the ready was needed
to keep those machines greased and primed: if an engine
was fussy, a prop gone cranky,
fixing to kick out, you had to hear it, catch
first warning

signals, then stomp hell out of those fuel pipes,
and wring the hoses' necks
before they cut their flow of juice
with your bare hands—or asbestos gloves, if you'd the time
and gumption to be getting
those heavy mitts on your paws before the freeze
hit the lines. . . . And none ever doubted his tales

about two abortive near-crash night landings
behind enemy lines.
Mid winter cold. Freezing sleet
to be whisked
from windshields & tail vent
cables, one wing's
flaps ice-jammed . . . Our Farfan landed
on-a-dime in a three acre woods clearing, managed
the minor repairs in few minutes
before the local militias found him,
good Cap a master of the skip-and-jump hopscotch takeoff:
three shakes of his trusty wood prop,
he'd be airborne once more . . . *O forget about*
raging war

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conditions, today's pilots needn't be skilled
Ace jiffy repairmen
into the peacetime flyer's bargain,
only one prime artistry's all ye need master in our day:
PILOTING, 'n that's too much
for you slackoff tenderfeets! . . . Cap's favorite
aircraft, *bar none,* were the all wood carved-block

small Mosquito bombers. In them, he flew dozens
of multi-strike missions
back in the German hinterlands,
knocking out
whole supply truck cordons
& munitions fleets
as they sped down shrouded dirt roadways
to the front lines. He loved best keen fragrances
of those differing hardwoods,
so kept all moving parts well-oiled
and polished himself. How could he trust the hack rookie
Air Force mechanics to service
his rosy-hued gleamy-paneled craft? He unpacked
and repacked

the housings, next wrapt the pipes & cylinders
with moist cloths to protect
fine woods from overheating or cracking;
asbestos fireproofing layers wound tightly over the bulks,
then puffing fire-resistant
sprays to enhance the natural sturdy seal
of the inborn resins, as prescribed by diagrams

in manuals and service charts. . . . To hold forth
upon natural beauties
of old wood MOSQUITOS was, to Farfan,
Lyric Verse,
and he seemed to operatize
old Norse Poesy
when he chanted to his dazed students
the quaint litanies: namings of aeronautical parts,
routines for best daily upkeep
and mellow wood tone. The war plane
might have been a cross between your antique Stradivarius
violin and a world's champion
racehorse, for all Farfan's polysyllabic
locutions

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of tranced recital. . . . One time, Cap was shot down:
a man in his late twenties
who'd flown dozens of strafing missions
in great battles of Malta and World War II without ever once
taking a hit to his wing,
tail, or fuselage; but this mortar shell caught
him in rear dead center, carved his whole tail section

clean off, much like a sardine-can opener
chisels away the flat top
panel of tin, all-of-a-piece.
Oh, he knew
in an instant what he'd lost!
All steering cables
and landing gear hookup had been voided
from his control stick at once, the warning signals
blinking on his dashboard, alarms
buzzing—he bent forward, one last time,
to kiss the sepias and pale maroons of that crown prince
assemblage of old woods,
then checked his chute fasteners & bailed out,
just before

the Mosquito's nose went into irreversible
downthrust . . . He fell to earth
three miles behind the front lines,
not far from eye range of sentry or trenches, and hid out
in thick brush; then he dug
himself a bodypit in earth (mock gravesite,
he fancied), popped out a few minutes each night

to scoop up roots and drink from rain puddles,
lapping water like a puppy
to save time—back to his shallow ditch.
He'd snap awake,
between naps, to a mixed chorus
of bombers overhead
(his pilot fellows) and anti-aircraft
shellings. . . . The students may well have perked up
on their stools to challenge
his story's last chapter, the escape
saga—how he eluded, finally, those German pursuers
aided by their bloodhounds, flares,
teargas bombs and flame throwers. But when,
purportedly,

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he crossed the borders into occupied Malaysia,
negotiated all checkpoints
with overt brashness of public display,
and passed freely out the heavily guarded exit turnstiles
to *The Free World*, who can fail
to mock his word portrait of himself as dressed
in the sarong and headdress of a native Malay. . . .

"Farfan, you are so tall and lightskinned,
wrong body type, odd shape
altogether," we cavil, this night,
over cocktails.
Without delay, our pilot flaps
out of his easy chair—
wordless, mute before us detractors—
and zips from the parlor, returning in six minutes:
his lengthy physique now wound,
smartly, in a bed sheet full-body
sarong, three hand towels wrapped in a passably colorful
head kerchief, pot belly
& hip spread masked by drapery of skirt kilts
as he rises

to full height, and struts across the gallery,
tossing off a few slangy
dialect phrases with quick tongue rolls.
Lastly, he places a large flower pot atop the headdress
and sweeps it about the room
with utmost balance—surety of neck poise to fool
us all, and a gaggle of goosestepping Nazis, to boot.

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BARBARA KRAFT

Last Days of Henry Miller

That last year he shuffled between his old-fashioned, high-set, walnut-dark bed, the desk at its foot, the Ping-Pong table in the lanai on which he now painted, a more sedentary kind of play for an octogenarian, and the dining table, in fact, a redwood picnic table covered with a cloth. This is where he held court every evening attired in his bathrobe, plaid or blue terry cloth, pajamas, fluffy white bedroom slippers and white socks. He was a tough old bird, rather like a turkey, with his croaky voice, heavily veined, creped hands, parchment-thin skin, wattled throat and indomitable, naked head.

As his body failed him, the eyes, the ears, the bowels, the bladder, the bones, he shrugged his shoulders and with head held high said, "We must accept what comes, don't you know." And then he would return to the arduous business of folding the napkin in front of him. The long-fingered, still graceful hands, bruised and etched with coagulated arteries, slowly smoothing the cloth, folding it in half, in quarters. This accomplished he would labor to roll the napkin up, fitting it, at length and with considerable effort, into the monogrammed, silver napkin holder that marked his place at table. One tiny island of control that could still be mastered with great concentration.

The word he used to describe his condition was *apocatastasis*, a Greek word meaning "restoration" and referring to the eternal round made by the planets which restores a state of being. The word also refers to the doctrine that Satan and all sinners will ultimately be restored to God. Though Henry accepted what was happening to him, there were moments when he flapped his wings in annoyance, an appropriate response for a man who had steadfastly refused to be overcome by anything. "You think for the man of great spirit it [death]

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should be a graceful thing. A just going to sleep and yet that isn't necessarily true. It could be awful, ignominious."

His humble efforts to carry on with his life were at times moving, at times exhausting, at times hysterically funny and at all times immensely and universally human. For Miller was not and never desired to be "somebody" in the sense that today everybody is somebody. Either through their own earned or unearned celebrity or through some vicarious attachment to celebrity. Miller was anybody and everybody, a meat-and-potatoes man, an ordinary bloke according to the literary critic Alfred Kazin, a man who would rather be at peace with himself than a writer according to his friend, the writer Wallace Fowlie. Although, with all due respect to Mr. Fowlie, Miller's rapprochement with peace was achieved by writing which ordered and transformed the Milleresque chaos into a turbulent and teaming celebration of life on its own terms.

Henry described himself as a plain, down-to-earth, simple man. He was also a genius who, if reincarnated, wanted to come back not a genius but an ordinary man, a horticulturist, as he told me one evening over dinner. No, I was not one of Henry's "ladies"; I was one of his "cooks" and Friday was my night chez Miller.

On this particular Friday evening, some six months before he died, I had to awaken him to come to the table. A punctilious man, he was orderly in all his habits. His pens, pencils and paper in their proper place on his desk, his watercolors, his paintbrushes neatly arranged on the Ping-Pong table, his dinner served at 7:00 P.M. The dedication to list making over the years. The famous, framed lists of places he had been, of places he had not been, lists of favorite foods, lists of favorite piano music, lists of women he had never slept with. Behind that Buddha-like equanimity lurked a Germanic heritage.

Usually he was up waiting for me but of late he had become so weak that he was no longer able to navigate alone the distance between bedroom and dining room. Debilitated by malnutrition, not an uncommon affliction of old age, and a kind of palsy, possibly caused by petit mal seizures, he was quite frail. His hands trembled, he was paralyzed on one side, deaf in one ear and blind in one eye, so he said, although he regularly commented on what I was wearing down to a pair of green

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suede cowboy boots I once showed up in. When sight failed him, his sense of smell came to the fore. "I can smell your perfume, Barbara. Hmmmmm. I can barely see anymore but I can still smell." The full lips gathered into a lopsided grin, exposing teeth that remained remarkably virile.

I roused the slight body that was all but invisible under the satin-covered, down comforter and eased him into the waiting walker. Earlier Charles, a tall black man whom Henry referred to as his "Negro," had been in to bathe and shave him. This was a daily routine.

At dinner that night he spoke about how he would come back "a man who tends flowers. Not a genius, or a writer, that's the worst." Pressed, he elaborated on what writing entailed, his eloquent, age-marked hands raised in decisive exclamation. "It's a curse. Yes, it's a flame. It owns you. It has possession over you. You are not master of yourself. You are consumed by this thing. And the books you write. They're not you. They're not me sitting here, this Henry Miller. They belong to someone else. It's terrible. You can never rest. People used to envy me my inspiration. I hate inspiration. It takes you over completely. I could never wait until it passed and I got rid of it."

But he never did get rid of it. Of inspiration. Nor did he rid himself of his obsession with woman, with *eros*, with life itself. Woman, *eros* and life were vital to Miller's sense of himself, imbued with a mystery and a magic which compelled and obsessed and bemused him without letup until June 7, 1980—the day his eternal round was completed.

"I keep my nose to the grindstone," he said. "Old age is terrible. It's a disease of the joints. It's awful when I get up in the morning. I can barely bend over to brush my teeth. It's only when I get to work solving problems that I forget about it."

Beset by a multitude of infirmities the last decade of his life, Miller worked as furiously as ever producing several books (among them the three-volume *Book of Friends*) and hundreds of watercolors. He continued to maintain his voluminous correspondence with the world and entertained a seemingly inexhaustible stream of visitors which ranged from Vietnamese immigrants to celebrities like Ava Gardner, Governor Jerry Brown and Warren Beatty who was then filming *Reds* in which Miller appeared in a cameo role. In between were people who

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came to interview him, academics who came to write about him, and film crews eager to commit to videotape the passing of an era.

Some he performed for, some he insulted, others he beguiled. He had a striking photograph of the young Ava Gardner in his entrance hall which hung next to a framed list of his favorite cock and cunt words. When the lady came to visit in the flesh Henry overheard her chauffeur asking, as they left, where she wanted to go. According to Miller, she responded "Anywhere. Just anywhere." Henry found that a remarkable answer. In August of 1978, Jerry Brown, accompanied by his entire entourage, paid a call at Ocampo Drive. Miller was in one of his wicked moods, being wicked was a pure delight to him, but he was never malicious. He greeted Brown, saying, "You know I think politicians are the scum of the earth, next to evangelists. I can't stand Billy Graham." Henry had a way of benignly saying outrageous things. Having said them he would sit back, a cat pawing a mouse, a crooked smile playing expectantly around his lips, waiting for the response his words would elicit.

Old friends came to see him and there were plenty of new ones as well. I belonged to this latter category as did Brenda Venus, who was the last love of Henry's life. A beautiful woman, with shining black hair that fell just above her waist and the soft speech of the South, Henry credited her with keeping him alive. "Without her I wouldn't be able to go on." Brenda, who admitted to thirty-one, had introduced herself to Henry by way of a manila envelope containing provocative photographs. He was enchanted and a meeting quickly followed. Brenda was to become the recipient of hundreds of Miller letters (published in 1986 by William Morrow as *Dear, dear Brenda*), as had been Anaïs Nin before her. A voluptuous woman, deceptively petite at the same time, Brenda had a sultry, smoky kind of beauty which coexisted with remarkably delicate features. It was as if aspects of both June Miller and Anaïs Nin had been reincarnated in her, and there is no doubt in my mind that God sent this particular Venus to ease Henry along the path to his final destiny.

He wrote Brenda four or five letters a day and there were many evenings when he would press a batch of these feverish

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missives into my hand to mail on my way home. He reveled in the pain and pleasure of this his last *affaire de coeur*, fretting when Brenda didn't call or couldn't come to see him, as miserable as a boy in the clutches of Cupid's first embrace. He prided himself that he treated her like a queen and often commented with wry bewilderment, "It is only now that I have finally learned how to love a woman. After five wives and when I'm beyond doing anything, now I've finally learned how to treat a woman." Seeing Brenda to the door was one of his gentlemanly, sunset gestures.

Brenda received a goodly number of Henry's watercolors and lithographs as did the rest of us who were a constant in his life. When he gave a painting he would apologize at the same time. "In a way I hate to give you this," he would say, "you'll have to have it framed and it's expensive. Do you mind?" He was a generous man and a thoughtful one too. One evening as he was signing a lithograph to give to Charles he stopped suddenly because he simply couldn't remember the man's last name. "You don't think that sounds condescending, do you? To write 'To Charles' without a last name?" Picking up his pen he added "with affection," and said, "Now, there won't be any doubt." He was very fond of Charles, whose last name I never did learn as he was one of the day people and I one of the evening ones. He liked Charles not only because Charles took care of him a few hours every day but, and perhaps more importantly, because Charles was not always smiling at him. Henry hated what he called idolaters, strongly suspected academics and detested being fussed over in any way.

As a result, there was no permanent help in the household which bumbled along haphazardly day to day. Besides Charles there was a sporadic secretary, the "cooks," and various itinerant people who slept there for a night or more as they passed through on the way to somewhere else.

The cooks were chosen from a list of people Henry enjoyed conversing with and evolved into a staple of his routine once he became housebound. Always a pragmatic man in practical matters, this is one of the ways Henry stayed plugged into the world. The list was long and the cooks rotated, although a few of us had fixed nights every week, Friday being mine. I was introduced into this system via a telegram from Miller's son

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Tony shortly after my first meeting with Henry. Subsequent to a radio program that I wrote and broadcast which was something of an analysis of the work and the man, I received an invitation to dinner from Miller's secretary. He had listened to a tape of the program and wanted to meet me. I went but not without some trepidation as I had heard he could be very difficult and blunt if he didn't like someone. As it turned out we had an immediate rapport, and I left thoroughly enchanted but hardly expecting that I would be invited a second time. A week or two later, I received a telegram from the Miller household: "Henry would like to know if you're available to cook this Saturday evening. Please respond immediately." His lifelong aversion to the telephone as a means of communication resulted in the legacy of his voluminous and prolix correspondence.

As for the cooks, many of whom were women, but not all, he once had the notion of inviting them to come at the same time to meet one another but decided in the end that it wouldn't work. "Women get along with women when they're alone, but when a man is around they are jealous and vie for the attention, don't you think?"

A modest man, surely the most unaffected, unself-conscious human being I have ever met, Henry resided downstairs in the Pacific Palisades home he had bought in the sixties to house his former wife Lepska (they had divorced in the early fifties), their two children, Tony and Val, and himself. And in later days, although there was a buzzer next to his bed, he refused to use it. When he wanted to summon his secretary or someone else in the house he would call on the telephone (there were two lines): "This is Henry, you know Henry who lives downstairs."

Those last few months when Henry began to fail badly I finally prevailed upon him to let a young man who was a friend of his, Bill Pickerill, move in on a permanent basis. He stubbornly resisted until I finally came up with the idea of telling him Bill had no place to live. This of course wasn't the case. Only then did he acquiesce, saying, "Well, why didn't you say so. Bill always has a home with me."

While Bill brought a semblance of order and regularity to the household, chaos gradually took up residence in Henry's innermost being. Many of the watercolors he did at this time had

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the word chaos scribbled across them and were reflective of the inner disquiet that took him backwards and forwards in time. "It's terrible to lose one's sight. I'm deaf and now I can't see. For someone who lives in the intellect it's awful. I've been having hallucinations, apparitions. So real that I sit up in bed and hold out my hand only to realize that I imagined the person. It's the damnedest thing."

One morning he awoke hungry and penniless in the Paris streets of the thirties, asking everyone who came into his room if there was any money in his wallet, in theirs, for breakfast as he was famished. While he could no longer read the newspaper he adamantly maintained the habit of it, holding it more often than not upside down at the breakfast table, refusing to relinquish it or to allow anyone to turn it right side up. Still the news of the day somehow managed to filter through where it metamorphosed into wild, chaotic tales in his dreams. He regaled us all one evening with a story of how he had been blindfolded and abducted from a movie theater by the Iranians earlier in the day. This adventure occurred at the height of the Iranian hostage crisis which ended the Carter presidency.

One of the last watercolors he produced showed the figure of a man looking off to the right, a female figure looking straight ahead and, between the two, a diminutive male figure sketched in blue mimicking the pose of the larger male. Scattered around the painting was the usual Miller iconography: a six-pointed star, squibbles locked into masses of red paint and blurbs of color suggestive of a dove, a fish. Underneath all of this was a four-legged, grimacing beast with the name Sarasota written inside its body. The beast's teeth were bared in a fierce expression and I often thought that was how Henry himself actually felt at this time. A beast with bared teeth. Henry said he had no idea what Sarasota meant or referred to. Nor could he relate to the word void which also found its way into the late watercolors. When asked over dinner one evening what it meant, he squinted up his eyes, scratched his head in perplexity and said, "I can't get it. I don't know what it is."

One of the dubious benefits of having been a female friend of Henry Miller was and is the raised eyebrows, the insinuations, the questions: "Were you one of his women? Did he talk dirty to you?" As most people have never ventured beyond the *Tropic*

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books into the more epiphanic pages of works like *The Colossus of Maroussi* or *Stand Still like the Hummingbird*, it is perhaps understandable that these questions were and are pre-eminent.

We had our obligatory "dirty" talk once only, early on, over a dinner of steamed zucchini, noodles romanoff, tomatoes provençale, melon and ice cream. The conversation evolved out of a general one that touched on favorite Miller lovers like Abelard and Héloise and Tristan and Isolde, on Anaïs Nin, on men and women and their differences. I myself prompted the conversation by reading him a short, erotic story I had recently written which led him into a discussion of how a man likes to take a woman. "Anyway," he said. "The more bestial, the more exciting. A man likes it standing up against a wall, bent over like an animal. There are times for a man when all he wants is a cunt. Any hole will do—dog, cow, goat. An opening in a fence even. Men want to fuck and get it off; women want to be made love to, to be held."

He then told a typical Miller story. He had been separated by circumstance from his wife for about ten days (a gentleman in his own way, he didn't say which one of the five he was referring to). "I was feeling horny," he said, "as we had a very satisfying sexual relationship." He claims he was at a county fair where he went into a barn that held all sorts of animals. Climbing up on a box he pulled a goat over so that they were on the same level. In the end he couldn't go through with it. "I was afraid someone might come in." Fact or fiction? Who knows. As he wrote in one of the essays in *The Wisdom of the Heart*, "Fiction and invention are the very fabric of life. The truth is in no way disturbed by the violent perturbations of the spirit."

Women perplexed Henry, possessors of a mystery that fascinated and eluded him. While he believed in duality and spoke loftily about the difference between *eros* and *agape*, it was almost impossible for him to conceive of a woman being capable of pure love. He did not see women as spiritual beings. He remained intrigued to the end that a woman could be simultaneously lascivious and innocent, and reminisced about the woman who had once come into his Paris flat, sat down on a chair, lifted her skirt, spread her legs wide and opened herself up for him. "She was so fragile. A jewel, a flower. Delicate. No matter what she did." He was as captivated by the memory of

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this experience as he had been nearly half a century earlier when it had occurred.

The traits he admired most in women were sincerity, beauty and like his friend Blaise Cendrars, innocence. "Women have to be beautiful. I don't just mean physically beautiful, but beautiful in their being. They have to have a soul also, you know. I don't care for beauty raw and nothing behind it. I never did. I was never attracted to that."

We discussed the notion of innocence more than once. I arguing that purity was a more desirable state than innocence as innocence was a condition devoid of experience, Edenic, whereas purity connoted both experience and wisdom; that no one, man or woman, could or should remain innocent; that ideally innocence evolves into a purity of spirit through the transformation of experience and age. He himself exemplified what I was trying to express. We never resolved this argument, although we returned to it on many occasions, as Henry was loath to part with his romance with innocence. He did agree, however, that to have experience and attempt to remain innocent was costly, saying, "To remain innocent one has to put on blinders and not look to the left or the right."

He numbered among his idols Nietzsche, Hamsun, Whitman and Lawrence, but was brought up short when asked about goddesses by a German television interviewer. After a long pause, he responded: "The only one would be Héloise. Do you know what she said to Abelard? And this when she was a Mother Superior and not a young woman anymore. She wrote to him 'Would that I loved my God as I love thee.' Can you imagine that. Wonderful."

Henry's real passion was for his work. He was also a man who liked himself and venerated life. Why else marry five times and father three children? He believed that art was glorification and that paradise was a creation of the individual mind, available to anyone, anywhere, regardless of the circumstances in which they found themselves. "I guess I do love my work," he said in talking about *Insomnia*, one of his favorite books. "I don't often reread what I've done but sometimes when I do I think 'Did I really do that?' And then I can't believe that I did it. Yes, I do love my work. You know if you don't like yourself, how can you like anyone else? When I look into the mirror I like myself. I

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love what I see. Even if I look terrible, it doesn't matter. And it's not ego I'm speaking of, it's id. I think everything comes from the id."

Over years of Friday night dinners I enjoyed Henry's stories and adventures which he spun out with zest and enthusiasm, laughter and often bafflement. And I would like to believe that a residue of his individualistic, and in that sense American, wisdom has remained in me, lingering like the aroma of the meals I prepared for him. While he was restricted to a bland diet, I tried to make his meals interesting, flavoring them with fresh herbs and garlic which is good for high blood pressure among other ailments. Occasionally I would ignore the diet altogether and fix a treat. He loved filet mignon (tournedos) which I served along with mashed potatoes mixed with leek-soaked milk. He was very appreciative of good food and nearly always commented on what he was eating.

When I arrived in the evenings, he enjoyed coming out into the kitchen for a Dubonnet before dinner. While I chopped and stirred, he would sit in his walker and chat with me. "You don't mind do you? Some people mind, don't you know. They get all confused." The conversation was always alive and vibrant, in the kitchen, at the table, meandering over familiar Miller terrain: Lou Andreas Salome, Nietzsche, Madame Blavatsky, Emma Goldman, the absolute, astrology, freedom of the spirit, love, the inaccessibility of truth, fabulating (lying), Anaïs, compromise, unconditional surrender.

While he accepted that truth ultimately lay beyond our mortal grasp, it was still an important concept to him. "Truth is wonderful," he would say. "It embraces everything and it's worth it and that from a man who can tell some tall lies. I can't tell you what it means to me to get letters from all over the world about just that—that I told the truth."

He had little sympathy with the young who took drugs, became groupies and generally dropped out; he viewed such behavior as pure escapism. The self-destructive behavior, in particular the use of drugs and alcohol, that is characteristic of so many of the young since the sixties—behavior also characteristic of so many of this century's best-known American male writers—was antipathetic to Miller. Free of the angst, guilt and self-doubt that tortured the majority of his contemporaries,

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Miller's work was consistently a celebration of the human condition in all of its exigencies. As he said to me in an interview we did for National Public Radio (and subsequently published in the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Spring 1981): "If you're going to be a whore, be a good whore, a great one. If you're going to be a saint, be a wonderful saint. Be it! Be it, whatever you are, to the hundredth degree. Whatever it is you are, accept yourself, first of all."

Another thing that he had no patience with was government support of the artist. He was convinced poverty brought forth great work. "When I wrote the *Tropic* books I was a desperate man . . . I owe everything to poverty. I wouldn't have become what I became without it." There was a time, before he left for Paris, when Miller begged in the streets and nearly became a professional as he put it. Then one night he quit. He was in the habit of walking uptown as the theaters emptied panhandling the crowd on his way back to Brooklyn. This particular night had not been lucrative and he was on his way home with only a nickel in his pocket for the subway. It was late and by the time he reached his stop it was pouring rain. He noticed a man in white tie and tails getting off whom he assumed had been to the opera.

When Miller approached him, the man pushed Henry aside rudely and walked on without a word. Then, with his back to Miller, he reached into his pockets and threw a handful of change into the mud-filled gutter. "I was really degraded, humiliated, you know. But there I was down on my hands and knees, picking up the change and wiping the mud off. Right then and there I swore I'd never beg again and I didn't. I've known it all. Every humiliation, degradation, poverty, starvation." This perhaps accounts for his dignity. Such experiences, as Nietzsche pointed out, either kill a man or strengthen him.

Henry's dignity never deserted him. During the final months of his life he sat at the table with head bowed forward, barely able to lift the fork from plate to mouth, drifting away and then pulling himself back, saying "Were you talking about me?" He hated to have the conversation pass him by. He had difficulty sitting upright and listed like a ship straining against its moorings in a heavy wind. "Am I leaning to the left? I feel as if I'm going to fall."

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On one occasion he tried to describe his state of mind over the preceding days. With a bewildered expression on his face, he shook his head sadly and said, "It's been like an adventure. I don't know where I am, where this place is, what this house is. It's the damnedest thing." I explained that it was his house and that I had been there all day, sitting by the pool. (For the past several weeks, since it was evident the end was near at hand, I had spent as much time as possible at the house.)

"The pool," he asked incredulously, "there's a swimming pool here?"

"Yes."

"Were there other people here?"

I named the three or four people who had dropped in during the day.

"That's all," he said. "What a shame. Weren't there others?"

I told him that the pool was his, not a public pool, which surprised him.

"Mine?" he asked.

"Yes, you own it."

"You don't say. I own it!"

"Yes and this house too."

He rubbed his eyes and ran his hands over his head, a familiar, caressing gesture by now, smoothing his nonexistent hair and said, "Amazing!"

He fell frequently, often rolled out of bed at night and was a mass of cuts, bruises and sores. When he was lifted from his walker to his chair at the table he would cry out in pain, yet the ritual of the dinners continued. His words came out garbled, his thoughts fragmented and undecipherable and there were long, impenetrable silences. The "don't you knows" were few and far between. Often his head would hover motionless an inch or two above his plate. When this happened a collar would be put around his neck, the kind used for whiplash victims, to give him some support. He dropped his fork and spittle dribbled from his mouth. Somehow he was aware of this and repeatedly tried to raise his napkin to wipe his face. Those hands, they were like nervous, independent beings, agitated creatures in continual, fluttering motion, flitting here and there, lighting on his head, adjusting his hearing aid, smoothing his napkin, rubbing his eyes. He feared he was losing his

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mind and dictated letters to this effect to Brenda and to his friends Lawrence Durrell and Alfred Perlès. "I think I'm going mad. I'm afraid I'm losing my mind."

Nearing the end a crazy strength coursed through his failing form, the terrible energy of the dying. One night, forgetting he could no longer walk, he managed to get into the bathroom where he closed the door before collapsing. The bathroom, as legendary as his lists and charts and part of the Miller lore, was covered floor to ceiling with photographs of friends, naked women, idols such as Nietzsche and Lawrence and gurus like Krishnamurti and Gurdjieff. When he was found by Bill Pickerill, he was gesticulating and talking to some image on the wall, calling, "Monsieur, Monsieur." According to Bill, Henry looked up calmly and said, "Oh, Bill, I'm so glad to see you again. How good that you're passing by just now. I'm having the damnedest time with this guy."

With all of this transpiring, it wasn't sad in that house, at that table, in that bathroom. Touching, yes. And moving. And immensely human and funny too. For Henry was a man at peace with himself. He had acted out and lived his beliefs. And when the by now rare "don't you know" crossed his lips, it was a burst of sunlight bringing tears to the eyes and a clutch of joy to the heart. One evening as he was being rolled off to bed he noticed my skirt which was bright red. Reaching forward, blind as he was, he gathered up the hem, stroking the material with his other hand, exclaiming how wonderful it was that I always wore such beautiful clothes.

In May of 1980, one month before Henry died, the Rumanian-born playwright Eugène Ionesco was visiting Los Angeles. I was doing an interview with him for National Public Radio and in the course of our meetings I mentioned that I knew Miller. Ionesco, eager to meet Henry for whom he had great admiration, asked if I could arrange it.

No two men could have been more different. Ionesco all doubt and despair, fixed on the contradictions, consumed by anguish; Miller, all accepting, preaching surrender, abdication and a self-created paradise, pure light. Yet they shared a reciprocal esteem for each other's work. Their starting point was similar; their roads different.

The meeting never occurred. Henry demurred, saying, "Oh,

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I don't want him to see me like this, how I am now." Adding a few minutes later, "If Ionesco could see me now, that's something he could write a play about." Instead I took a set of books inscribed to Ionesco from Miller.

When the end came it wasn't awful, it wasn't ignominious. It all happened very simply and was just short of a "going to sleep." Henry died at home in his own bed in the arms of Bill Pickerill on a Saturday afternoon.

I end this memoir with Miller's own words, words written about Auguste, his clown, in *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*: "Perhaps I have not limned his portrait too clearly. But he exists, if only for the reason that I imagined him to be. He came from the blue and returns to the blue. He has not perished, he is not lost. Neither will he be forgotten."

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W. S. MERWIN

Garden

When I still had to reach up for the door knob
I was wondering why the Lord God whoever that was
who had made everything in heaven and earth
and knew it was good and that nobody could hurt it
had decided to plant a garden apart
from everything and put some things inside it
leaving all the rest outside where we were
so the garden would be somewhere we would never see
and we would know of it only that it could not be known
a bulb waiting in pebbles in a glass of water
in sunlight at a window You will not be wanting
the garden too the husband said as an afterthought
but I said yes I would which was all I knew of it
even the word sounding strange to me for the seedy
remnant trailing out of its gray ravelled walls
on the ridge where the plateau dropped away to the valley
old trees shaded the side toward the village
lichens silvered the tangled plum branches hiding
the far end the scrape of the heavy door as it dragged
across the stone sill had deepened its indelible
groove before I knew it and a patch of wilting
stalks out in the heat shimmer stood above potatoes
someone had cultivated there among the stately nettles
it was not time yet for me to glimpse the clay
itself dark in rain rusting in summer shallow
over fissured limestone here and there almost
at the surface I had yet to be shown how the cold
softened it what the moles made of it where the snake
smiled on it from the foot of the wall what the redstart
watched in it what would prosper in it what it would become
I had yet to know how it would appear to me

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BRUCE BEASLEY

The Conceiving

> Invisible are all beings before birth and after death invisible again. They are seen between two unseens. Why in this truth find sorrow?
>
> —Bhagavad-Gita

1

What is this weariness
with breath after breath after breath,

this turning-inward
to escape from smaller and smaller

talk? I have always wanted to be
anonymous, unbidden into speech, withdrawn

into what remnant of the spirit's
left in me,

and there I find you, uncreated,
in that poverty of the senses where you stay,

prefoetal and invisible and blind.
If I make us a haven

here inside,
hypostasis of father and child,

not physical yet, not real,
will you let me lead you back

to earth someday, will you forgive
what avarice makes us make you

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come alive? This transubstantiation
would give you years

of pleasure intense and always receding, a world
so glutted with things I sometimes make my way

out of it awhile
to rest in your stripped landscape; going out,

I cut a swath
from here to there, a clearing

by which someday you'll find your own way in.

2

Here at the Cinque Terre—
the five earths—
we wait for you
in spare, unmediated places, an earth
almost too physical to endure:
surfspume into algae-colored grottoes of cloven stone,
octopus-tendrilled
cactuses crawling off seacliffs,
here where the soul's
impossible to tell
from the objects of its appetite:
burnt crusts of bread, strips
of black-roasted red peppers, oozing their oil:

five earths, five senses, what veils and seals to tear—

3

Look at the gulls stunned over downbent seapines,
and the schooners anchored in the noon-still of the bay,
and the lighthouse waiting, withholding
its timed
shocks—

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It's a world
with a stasis of its own,
and flux as well: smell,
all at once, these rosemary sprigs
on turning skewers of chicken,
and tufts of honeysuckle,
and the salt
sea—

Then beg creation to admit you,
the way roots
that have cracked a stone wall
grow thick, sealing the fissure—

4

Untethered one, if you dare
enter this place of appetite
and satiation—
the slag and dross of hungers and of love—
with nothing but sleep and prayer
to take you back,

how we'll hold you,

and recite you the new world's things:

magenta, sienna, ivory,
woodgrain and grain of stone, shrunk soap,
heaped peaches,
exultation
of bells—

Such profusion
you'll watch recede from you,
richer and more splendid as it goes,

hour after hour,
sandspit and grave.

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5

This life of the body, this ceaseless prayer,

how can I tell it to you?
It costs distance, and diminishment,

wave after wave raised by a lost disturbance,
some midocean squall

that gave them birth.
But see with what ravishment

and splendor they arrive,
here where slate's

layered over limestone, seagrass, and slime,
where the Gulf

of Paradise floods the land's hollows.
It's labor

and a kind of worship, to let creation
enter through the senses, in all its defective

splurge: poppies on mulepaths,
teal glut of the surf

the instant before it breaks: come bear
witness with us, child, among

the things that come, and overwhelm us, and vanish again.

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STEVE YARBROUGH

House of Health

Cooper's office is across the street from Indianola Hardware, in a building that used to be an appliance store. He has his waiting area out front, and all the treatment rooms and the x-ray equipment are in the back. Paperback racks are attached to the walls. They contain such books and pamphlets as *The Health Hazards of Ice Cream, Are You a Saltaholic?* and *The Biblical Foundations of Chiropractic.* A note taped to the front of each rack says "Please take as many as you need."

This morning, there's the regular array of suffering flesh inside. Two or three old ladies whose names I don't know and a guy named Reginelli who got broadsided a few weeks ago at the intersection of 49 and 82. There's also a tall redheaded woman named Sara Mitchell.

Reginelli and the old ladies ignore me when I walk in. Just as I feel my face start to flush, Sara says, "Good morning, James. How's Carol?"

Carol's my daughter. She's seventeen, a senior in high school. She's blonde and bright and almost eight months pregnant. Her boyfriend's gone to live in Montana with his uncle. Carol doesn't know exactly where he is and if she did she wouldn't tell me, because she'd be afraid I might drive up there and kill him. Most days I don't think I would, but some days I think I might. His father's dead, so I can't kill him. His mother knows I'd never hurt a woman, but she still heads the other way if she sees me on the street.

At the mention of Carol, Reginelli and the old ladies lean forward.

"She's doing pretty well," I tell Sara, sitting down beside her. "It's a hectic time, though. The baby's due, she's got graduation coming up, I'm trying to break land."

"And it's been raining like the pipes up in the sky have sprung a leak," Sara finishes up. "You ought to put your land

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in fishponds, James. You're not quite so much at the mercy of the elements then."

Sara's the only woman catfish farmer I know of. She lives about halfway between Indianola and Leland. She's got three or four other women working for her, all of them living out there on her land. Sometimes you'll see two or three of them together at the Beer Smith Lounge, drinking Bud and shooting pool or playing shuffleboard. They're all about forty. They wear khaki work clothes and keep their hair cut short, but they're still nice-looking women.

You can probably imagine what most folks say about them, though. Southern Prime, the big catfish plant on the outskirts of town, wouldn't let Sara buy stock when she tried. She sells her fish to a black man who owns a processing plant up near Drew.

"I'd love to outsmart the elements," I tell her. "I just can't afford the start up costs."

"Oh, it's a pain in the neck getting started," she says. "I'd be the last person in the world to deny that."

We sit together for almost half-an-hour, talking idly about the price of fish and the cost of pre-emergents, about the weather forecast and the new man who's taken over at Planters' Bank. A couple of folks leave, a couple more enter. One or two of them nod at us, but the others pretend neither one of us is here. We might as well be two empty chairs.

Cooper's wife finally steps into the waiting room and tells Sara she can come on back.

"See you later, James," Sara says. "You ever want to come out and look at my little operation, I'd be happy to show it to you. We've been able to keep our costs down. There's ways."

"Thanks," I say. "I might take you up on it."

A few minutes later it's my turn. I walk through the door and down the hall, past cardboard cartons of the herbs, charcoal, sea water and other unusual remedies that Cooper prescribes for everything from warts to melanoma. Cooper's wife puts me in the third room on the right. Next door Cooper's just finished adjusting Sara. "You get some rest now," he says.

Cooper's in his mid-forties, just like me. He's a thin blond man who wears some of the worst clothes you ever saw. His pants are polyester double-knits, always plaid, the kind I

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remember wearing to church back in the seventies, which is probably when he bought his. Cooper's not exactly fashion conscious.

I started coming to him right after my wife Jackie got killed in a car wreck. Carol was just five at the time, and she was waking up a lot at night, having bad dreams. I'd jump out of bed, run into her room and pick her up, and a couple of times when I did that, my back went out on me. One night the pain hit me so hard I ended up on the floor. The next thing I knew, Carol was screaming *Daddy* and bending over me, her little hands clamped to her ears. The white light behind my eyes had almost struck me blind, but I could see her face clearly enough to realize she thought her dad was dead too.

I rarely feel that kind of pain anymore, but every now and then I get headaches and my neck stiffens up. Within a few days the pain has spread to my lower back and legs, and if I don't make a visit to Cooper, I start having trouble just standing up and walking.

This morning Cooper has me sit on the adjustment table while he stands behind me and runs a calorimeter up my neck.

"Eight," he says.

He walks over to the desk where my chart lies and writes the number down. "That's the highest you've been in over two years."

"I'm feeling pretty tense, I guess."

"You need to relax more," Cooper says. "Why don't you come out this weekend and spend some time in my sauna? I've invited a couple of the other patients."

"Thanks," I say. "If it ever quits raining, I may have to spend the weekend in the field. Otherwise, I'll give you a call and come ahead."

He measures my leg-length—the right one's five-sixteenths shorter than the left today—then tells me to lie on my right side.

Standing inches away from my face, he lays his right hand gently on the side of my neck. He feels around till he finds the first vertebra. It's the one all the nerve channels pass through. He says that if you line it up right, everything else will fall into line too. He's right, I believe, but the problem is that you line it

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up and it stays in place for a little while and then it starts slipping again.

Cooper doesn't snap your bones—he's from a different school. He exerts pressure, fifty or sixty pounds of it, on his right forearm with his left hand, and the force is transferred to my neck through his fingers. His legs tremble while he presses on his arm, I can hear his joints cracking. But I never feel him making the adjustment.

When he's finished, he smiles and says, "Get a lot of rest, James. Sleep's the nicest gift you can give yourself."

Since I've pushed my credit line to the limit, sleep's about all I can afford to give myself, I think. Then it occurs to me that I can't really afford to give myself that either, at least not if it stops raining.

Outside, it's pounding down so hard I can barely see the street. I get soaked just walking to the pickup. I'm about to crank it when Sara Mitchell pulls up beside me. She's driving a new GMC. Mine's ten years old.

She leans across her seat and rolls down the window. I see her face through a solid sheet of water. "Hey, James," she says. "Did Cooper invite you out to his place on Saturday?"

"Yeah."

"I'm going too. Want me to pick you up?"

It's April 2. I need to start planting by the middle of the month, and I haven't got a single row laid. If the sun's out Saturday, I ought to glue my rear to the seat of a tractor. But I think about Cooper telling me to relax.

"Why not?" I say, looking through the rain at Sara Mitchell.

Going home, I turn off the highway at the intersection where Jackie got killed.

She was pulling into 49, and she looked right but not left. A big truck from Sterne's Grocery Company plowed into the driver's side door. He knocked her into a telephone pole, and for a long time afterwards you could see a white stripe on the pole where the paint on her car had smudged off. Every time I went to town, I'd look at that pole and see that strip of paint, and I'd feel shaky and weak, as if I'd stood too long in a hot shower and needed to lie down and cool off.

I mentioned it to three or four friends. One day I drove by

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and discovered the pole had been moved about fifteen feet, so that it stood on the far side of a Southern Prime billboard and was no longer visible from the intersection. I called the phone company and asked about it. They said a group of citizens had requested it be moved.

I went to one of those same folks when I found out Carol was pregnant. The whole time I was talking to him, he stared at the ground and drew circles in the dirt with his toe. When I stopped, he finally looked me in the eye.

"Well, James," he said, "the bad news is you've got a problem. The good news is you can fix it with five hundred dollars."

At first I couldn't figure out how the same man who'd gone to the phone company and demanded they move a pole just to make me feel better could say what he'd just said. Then it hit me. In both cases something needed to be moved. But having my wife get killed wasn't embarrassing, so my neighbors could lay hands on my grief and pull at least some of it aside. Having my daughter get pregnant was plenty embarrassing, so I'd have to move the problem this time myself.

When I get home this morning, Carol's lying on her side on the living room floor. She's got a pillow between her legs, and she's reading a biology text. Five or six months ago, I probably would have made some sort of half-assed crack about it being a little bit late to learn biology lessons, but this morning I just say, "Hi, hon."

"Hi, Daddy," she says. "There's a stack of mail on the table."

The top envelope is from the obstetrician over in Greenville. I don't have to open it to find out what's inside. It's a bill for prenatal care. There's no maternity benefit on our health insurance policy. It never occurred to me we'd need it.

"Didn't feel like going to school today?" I say.

"I just wasn't up to it."

"Not falling too far behind?"

"Not if I can help it. And Daddy?"

She's staring up at me. She's normally a thin girl, but right now her cheeks are round and flushed, and she looks so much like her mother did when she was pregnant that for a moment I feel like there's a blockage in my throat, that I'll choke if it doesn't shift aside. "Yeah, hon?"

"Everything's okay. I'm real serious."

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I've been trying my best to make up for the way I behaved when I found out she was pregnant, and she's been trying her best to convince me I didn't do us lasting damage. But the truth is I was awful.

For a long time after her mother was killed, I didn't think about other women. I had my hands full being mother and father and trying to keep my farm off the auction block. I'd come home from the field every night and take over from the black woman who looked after Carol when she got in from school. I'd give Carol a bath, read her a book or two, put her to bed, then lie on the couch, drinking beer and remembering what it was like when Jackie was still alive. We used to eat supper late, sit for a while watching TV or listening to music, then we'd take a hot shower together. Afterwards, we'd walk down the hall wearing nothing but our towels and fall into bed and make love. Her hair, damp from the shower, plastered itself to my cheek as I pressed my face against hers. I could hear her labored breathing, feel her fingernails raking my back.

I passed a lot of nights just thinking about Jackie. Then one day in the Piggly Wiggly, about three or maybe four years after the wreck, I caught myself staring at the cashier. Pretty soon I was staring at every woman I found attractive, and almost every woman looked good to me. Sometimes, when I was out in the field on a tractor, I'd construct lists in my mind of everybody I wished I could sleep with. The lists got so long I started making them restrictive. I'd list all the women under thirty that appealed to me, then all the women over thirty. All the blondes, all the redheads, all the brunettes. The Baptists, the Methodists, the Presbyterians. The ones that I thought would make good mothers for Carol and the ones I thought wouldn't.

They all had one thing in common: they were married. In the Delta, almost everybody beyond the age of about twenty is. After a while, I just gave up and quit looking. But all those years I was raising Carol, I kept promising myself that once she finished high school, I'd sell my land and equipment. I'd give her most of the money, so she could go to Ole Miss and live in a decent apartment while she got her degree, and in the meantime I'd move to a city, Atlanta or maybe New Orleans, someplace where there'd be a few more people like me, people who weren't married and settled, people whose lives were not

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laid out in straight rows. If I looked hard enough and long enough, I thought, I'd find somebody to share my time with. Maybe she wouldn't make me feel the way Jackie had, but at least I'd have someone to care for.

So when Carol came home one day and sat down at the table and told me she was pregnant—and that she planned to keep the baby, even though she'd never wanted one until this one was growing inside her—what she was telling me, for all practical purposes, was to forget the promises I'd made to myself. She was telling me to get ready, at forty-four, to live the last twelve years all over again.

"You're a sweetheart," I tell her now.

She lays the biology book down and tries to sit up. She's so big she can't quite make it. I walk over and grasp her hand.

"Heave ho," I say.

With a groan she rises. "You know what?" she says.

"What, hon?"

"I'm feeling kind of funny this morning."

"Funny how?"

She rubs her stomach. "I don't know. Kind of like something's squeezing me and then letting go again."

An hour later we're at Washington Regional in Greenville. They show us into what looks like an operating room: there's an elevated table, a cart with a monitor on it, lots of fluorescent lights that make the air seem electric.

The doctor runs a sensor over Carol's stomach, and all of us sit gazing at a black and white image that appears on the monitor.

"There's your baby," he says.

It doesn't look much like a baby, it's just a shifting blob on the screen, but Carol's eyes tear up when she sees it.

In the meantime the contractions have stopped. The doctor says he can't tell why they started, but one thing he can see from the ultrasound is that the baby's in the breech position, just like Carol was when Jackie gave birth. He doesn't need to tell me what that means. Unless the baby turns, we're headed for a C section.

Later, while Carol's getting dressed, I follow the doctor into the hallway and ask him how much a C section costs these days.

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"Around five thousand," he says, writing something onto Carol's chart. "Assuming there are no complications."

Friday afternoon it clears off, so I climb onto an old red-bellied Ford and spend the rest of the day ditching. The tractor's got rice-and-cane tires on it, and they cut deep grooves across the fields. Once the water starts running off, I start to feel better. If we can just have a few clear days, we'll lay the rows out, and the seed'll be in the ground by the last week of April.

I eat supper, then go back out and work for most of the night. I fall into bed half-dead at three o'clock.

I wake up Saturday morning about nine. Sun is streaming through the window, and the telephone's ringing. I reach out and lift the receiver.

"Ready to go?" Sara Mitchell says.

"Damn," I say, swinging my legs out of bed, "I almost forgot."

She picks me up about a quarter till ten. I'm still feeling sleepy. I didn't drink coffee, because Cooper insists you not touch it whenever you come for a treatment, and I figure a trip to his sauna qualifies.

Sara's wearing white shorts, a tight tee shirt with a drawing of a catfish on it. Her arms and legs are as freckled as her face.

"Remember what I was telling you the other day?" she says while she drives. "About how when you farm catfish, you're not at the mercy of the elements?"

"Yeah. Changed your mind?"

"Thursday afternoon, the water in a couple of our ponds rose up over the edge of the levee. I bet we lost twenty thousand fish. They just swam away in the road ditch."

Twenty thousand fish is about twelve thousand dollars' worth of stock. "If that happened to me," I say, "I don't know but what I'd swim off with them."

Sara laughs. "I might have too," she says, "if I hadn't been looking forward to coming out to Cooper's. There's not much that can beat a good three- or four-hour sweat."

Cooper's waiting for us in front of his house, which looks a lot like the picture on a bottle of Log Cabin Syrup, except that Cooper's place is huge and it's got solar panels in the roof. He and his wife built the house by hand.

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This morning, he's naked except for a pair of cut-off polyester plaids. No shoes, no shirt. His chest is hairless, his arms are thin as bristles.

He says his wife is visiting their son in Yazoo City, but he's got the sauna hot and ready, so the three of us walk around back.

The structure that contains Cooper's sauna is known to all his patients as the House of Health. It's about the size of a bathhouse, and it's made out of the cypress trees Cooper felled to create space for it. There are no windows, just a single door.

Inside, he opens a cupboard and hands us each a fresh towel. It occurs to me that neither Sara nor I have brought anything to wear in the sauna. I've been here before, but it's always just been Cooper and me who got in together, and both of us just stripped off.

Which, as it turns out, is what Cooper and Sara begin to do now. He unzips his pants and lets them fall to the floor, then steps out of his boxer shorts. Sara raises her arms and starts wiggling out of her tee shirt.

There's an awful moment when I wonder if I'll be able to peel my eyes away. There's an even worse moment when I realize that I can't, that I'd have an easier time persuading myself to pick up a cottonmouth and kiss it.

Sara's breasts are freckled too and even larger than I would have guessed. Her nipples are not pink or rose-colored, they're the brown of German chocolate.

When she sees me staring at her, she says, "I've got a lump in the left one. It's malignant. Want to know what cancer feels like?"

She reaches out and grasps my right hand and pulls it toward her. While Cooper looks on, I wait to see if my palm will recoil from the breast I ached to touch a few seconds ago.

"There," she says. "Feel it?"

It's about an inch and a half to the right of her nipple. It feels like a pebble. A large one.

"It used to be damn near as big as a Ping-Pong ball," Sara says. "Cooper's been shrinking it for me."

The notion that somebody would let Cooper treat them for cancer isn't as strange to me now as it would have been a few years ago. I considered taking Carol to him for her prenatal care. She refused. She thinks he's a quack.

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"How long's the lump been there?" I ask.

"Almost two years," she says. "I started coming to our friend here after a regular doctor down in Jackson told me what the standard kind of treatment involved."

I ask Cooper how he's treating it.

"With a non-toxic synthetic called Cancell," he says. "It lowers the voltage in the body's electrical system. Disease cells are all low voltage cells anyway, so when the body's voltage drops just a little bit, the sick cells die off first."

"The rest of me's doing fine," Sara says. As if to prove it, she unbuttons her shorts.

I manage to keep my eyes off her as she and Cooper enter the sauna. Quickly, I shed my own clothes and follow them.

The three of us sit together on a wooden bench, Sara between Cooper and me. Every now and then Cooper dips a big mug into a pan filled with water and then dashes the water onto the rocks. Heat rises off them, burning our noses.

Within a few minutes we're all soaking wet. The only light comes from the red-hot rods underneath the rocks, but there's enough of it for us to see one another. We're gleaming. Our skin shines under the sweat.

"I don't know," I say. "I might need some of that Cancell too."

Sara says, "What's wrong with you?"

"I feel like my voltage is running a little bit high. You saw me staring at you, didn't you?"

"I know you're by yourself, James," she says.

There are times in your life when you know you're no longer in command of your own body. The first time my back went out, I had that feeling, and I imagine Jackie must have had it in the split second when she knew she'd been hit by something big. I suspect women feel it every time they give birth. You know some sort of force is running through you, that it may make you swoon or buck, that it may rock you like an epileptic seizure.

Maybe it's the rush of sweat from my pores, maybe the heat has gone to my head. Whatever the cause, I've got that feeling now.

"If I melt," I tell Cooper, "just throw me on the rocks. I'm feeling mighty porous."

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My left knee's trembling. Sara lays her hand on it and firmly holds it still. "I'm glad I'm porous," she says.

"Yeah?"

"Yes sir. There's some stuff inside me that needs to get the hell out."

Cooper stands up, throws more water on the rocks, and sits down next to me, so that now I'm between him and Sara.

"The body's a house, James," he says. "Houses get dirty. We're just giving ourselves a good spring cleaning."

The weather stays clear for the next two weeks. We get the rows laid out, and three days later we start dropping seed. I own two eight-row planters that hill-drop the cotton, spray it and fertilize it all at the same time. I've got four men working for me, so all of us together are able to keep those rigs in the field pretty much around the clock. Before too long we'll see the cotton start growing, pushing its way up through the ground.

Carol enters her last month, and just as you'd expect, it's a trying time. She's as big as the gym the basketball team plays in, and she hears several cracks about her size from the other kids. I tell her I intend to call a daddy or two and tell them what I think, but she says no.

"Most people are being nice about it," she says. Her home-room teacher plans to give her a baby shower.

She's too tired to cook, so I buy us a lot of TV dinners, the fancy kind that you have to go to Greenville to buy and then hurry home with before they all thaw out. Sometimes Carol eats two of them at a sitting—sweet and sour chicken, Szechuan style, with vegetarian lasagna or Texas barbecue.

I see Sara Mitchell twice at Cooper's office and then once on the street downtown. At his office, we talk about the weather, Carol's condition, Cooper's technique, different methods of aerating catfish ponds, the possibility that the workers at Southern Prime might go on strike. We don't discuss cancer or saunas.

But the day I see her downtown, I lean on a parking meter in front of Piggly Wiggly and say, "How's that lump?"

"Still there," she says. "It's gotten bigger again."

"How much bigger?"

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"Oh, not a lot. Just a fraction of a centimeter's all."

"You don't seem to worry too much about it."

"Worrying won't cure it."

"I wish I could think like that."

"I had to learn to," she says. "Back when I first started going to Cooper, I was tied up in knots. I'm a lot more relaxed now. It feels good."

I say, "You want to come over for supper one night? Carol and I are eating some great TV dinners."

"I'll come for supper," she says, "but I won't eat a TV dinner. How about I bring a mess of fish and fry 'em up?"

She drives over the next night. She and Carol know each other by sight, because years ago, before Sara went into catfish farming, she taught P.E. at the elementary school, and Carol was in some of her classes.

"You've really grown up," Sara says.

"And out," says Carol.

"How you feeling?"

"Hungry."

"We can fix that."

Sara and I walk out to her truck and lift a heavy ice chest. We tote it up onto the porch. I raise the lid and find eight or nine good-sized catfish lying on a bed of crushed ice.

"I wish they tasted like they used to," Sara says. "You remember that muddy flavor a good river cat had?"

While she and Carol work in the kitchen, rolling hush puppies and frying potatoes, I clean the fish. I clean them the way my dad did, making a single slit right behind the head, skinning them with pliers, then chopping off the head and tail and scraping out the insides.

I hang around the kitchen drinking beer and sniffing the good smells while Sara and Carol cook the fish and mix up a big bowl of cole slaw. Watching them move back and forth between the counter and the stove, their fingers dripping batter, their faces damp and flushed, I allow myself to feel like I'm surrounded by family. I pretend it's an ordinary evening in an ordinary house, a house that's home to just the right number of bodies.

At supper Sara drinks a beer with me, and Carol drains two tall glasses of iced tea. She tells Sara what she'll name the baby

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if it's a girl—Jackie, after her mother—but when Sara says, "And what if it's a boy?" Carol's lips set in a determined line. She says nothing.

My fingertips whiten on the Budweiser bottle. Just last night she told me she still believed she and her boyfriend would get back together, that sooner or later he'd come home and they'd be married. "If it's a boy," I say, "she wants to name it Kenneth."

Sara chews a mouthful of catfish. "Who's Kenneth?" she asks, then notices my face.

"Kenneth Bigby," I say. "He's a much-felt absence these days."

Carol lays her fork down. Her blue eyes are clear, clean of any anger. "I'm used to feeling absence," she says, looking from me to Sara. Her hands close over her belly. "Now I feel a presence for a change."

Sara nods, as if she knows what Carol means. For a moment I can't understand how she could know. Then suddenly I do understand, and understanding chills me, like cool air on your skin when you've worked up a sweat.

I don't belong at the table with these two. Nothing grows inside me.

I'm lying in Cooper's office, waiting for him to adjust me. It's the second Thursday in May. It's raining again, has been raining now for four days straight. My fields are underwater. Last night I dreamed about 1973. That spring was a lot like this spring. It poured the whole month of March and the first few days of April, then it cleared off, the weather turned as pretty as you ever saw it, so pretty I remember driving through the field on the tractor and singing *It ain't gonna rain, it ain't gonna snow*. I was half right. Three weeks after we got the seed in the ground, a cold front blew in, and by the time we saw the sun again, my cotton crop was just a dim memory. We managed to plant some soybeans that year, but the market was glutted. It took me two good years to make up for that bad one. This year, if I lose the cotton, I'll go under with it. I can't borrow enough to plant anything else.

Cooper makes me lie on my right side. He rolls up his

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shirt-sleeves, he lays his hand on me. The joints in his knees and his elbow pop and crack.

While he works, I close my eyes. He's manipulating the most important bone in my body, but as always I feel nothing. And as always I find myself wishing something both unreasonable and impossible: that at least a few of the other adjustments I've had to undergo—the death of the woman I loved, the oncoming birth of somebody I'm afraid I won't care for, no matter how hard I try—could have been undergone without pain.

"Rest," Cooper says, as I lie there numb. "Just do your best to take it easy and relax. We're dealing with a large misalignment."

The following morning Carol and Sara Mitchell and I drive to Washington Regional in a rainstorm. Carol's due date's just ten days away, and the baby hasn't turned. The obstetrician intends to try something called external version. What that means is that while Carol lies on her back, the doctor's going to grab the baby and try to exert enough force on it to make it turn headfirst. Sometimes it brings on labor. It works about one time in three.

We pull into the outpatient lot. Sara holds an umbrella over Carol's head, and we slog through puddles toward the building.

They tell Sara and me to wait in the lobby while Carol gets ready for the procedure. We take seats in a corner. Across the room, an old man in a pair of lime-colored pajamas sits in a wheelchair, staring at a television that's bolted to a platform on the wall like one of those monitors they use to catch you stealing at the grocery store.

A middle-aged black couple sit together by the window, whispering to each other. Their eyes are red. Either they've sat up all night or else they've been crying or maybe they've been doing both. I wonder what grief has lurched into their lives, what they had yesterday that they might not have today.

"You know what?" I say.

"What?"

"I think the word *it* is about the scariest thing in town."

She shakes her head. "No," she says, "it's not. The scariest things in town all have specific names. The word *it*'s not scary till you make it scary. It might mean a good cool beer on a hot

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day or a thousand-dollar jackpot in the Piggly Wiggly drawing. There's no reason to assume it means a tornado or a tumor till you hear those words themselves."

"You're a good person," I say, "for me to hang around."

"I'm glad to hear it. I hope I'm available to be hung around with for many a year to come."

"When you were in about the ninth or tenth grade," I say, "did you ever have some earnest little sophomore fellow, maybe one that played tuba in the band and made A's in all his French classes, come up to you in the hall between periods and clear his throat and say something really inane, like 'Sara, I wanted you to know I'm interested in you'?"

She laughs. "No," she says. "If he had, I probably would have had his pants down in about three seconds flat. I was pretty hot to trot about that time."

"What about now?"

The laugh lines disappear from her face. "Oh, my," she says.

"What?"

"Well," she says, "it's not that I'm not hot to trot."

"So what is it?"

"I should have known," she says, "that you're the sort of person that doesn't place much stock in rumors."

For a second I can't imagine what she's talking about. Then I remember the women I've seen her shooting pool with, the ones who work on her farm. They appear so swiftly in the front of my mind that I know they've been in the back all the time. Together Sara and those women form a unit, a great big *it* that I never had to name till just now.

"I guess you could say I'm trotting in a different direction now," Sara says. "You know what I mean?"

"I guess maybe I do," I tell her. "I probably knew it all along and just chose to ignore it. It wasn't the way I wanted things to be."

"When your grandchild's born, James, I can't be its grandma," she says. "But I can promise it won't ever lack aunts."

They call me on the intercom, and we walk back to the OB area. The nurse asks if Sara's Carol's mother, and when I say she's not, the nurse says she's sorry but only family can attend.

They've got Carol lying on a table in another sterile room.

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There's a broad black strap around her belly, and it's hooked up to a monitor. The monitor will measure the baby's heart rate, which is supposed to rise if the procedure brings on labor.

Carol's face is pale. I can tell she's scared. She's gripping the sides of the table.

I lean over and kiss her on the cheek. "You know what you need to do?" I say.

"Relax?"

"You bet."

The doctor tells her that there's one rule we have to agree on. "When it hurts," he says, "it's all right to yell your head off. Okay?"

"If she doesn't," I say, "I may."

He grins at Carol. "Dads can't stand a lot of pain."

She reaches out and squeezes my hand. "Mine can," she says.

The doctor leans over her and while I hold one of her hands and the nurse holds the other, he feels around her stomach till he finds the baby's head.

"Here we go," he says. Gritting his teeth, he pushes. Carol gasps, and all the color that was left in her face drains away. The doctor grunts and pushes again.

Two things happen at once. Carol shrieks, and the nurse tells the doctor he'd better look at the monitor.

He glances at it. Whatever it is he sees there makes him lock his jaw.

"Honey," he tells Carol, "your baby's not going to let me turn it. That's the bad news. The good news is you'll be a mother this morning."

A damp sheen covers her forehead. "I feel it," she says. "I really feel it."

I'm sitting on a metal stool next to Carol. They've tied her hands down to keep her from jerking, and they've given her a big shot to make her numb. I'd like to have one too, but I don't ask.

Outside, as I was waiting on them to let me into the operating room, Sara said, "Cooper claims there's never a need to do a C section."

"Cooper's brand of medicine only works," I said, "if you really believe in it, and Carol just doesn't."

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"No medicine works unless you believe in it," Sara said. "I wouldn't want a C section if it was me, but it's not and I don't guess it ever will be. Jackie had Carol that way, didn't she?"

"Yeah. But back then the guy didn't go in and watch."

"So this is a first for you."

"The first and the last. Next time she does it, she better have a goddam spouse."

"Sometimes," Sara said, "that's not possible," and as soon as she said it, I realized I ought to know it better than anybody else around, except maybe for Sara herself.

A couple of doctors, an intern, and two or three nurses are working away behind the curtain that separates Carol's eyes and mine from what they're doing. Metal instruments clink, I hear the sound of suction.

I sit here thinking that in a way I'm like the baby: I don't want to turn in another direction. I've clung to one notion of what a family is or should be, even though that kind of family's not possible for me. I've defined love and need in straight narrow ways. Gentle adjustment won't work.

One of the nurses tells Carol, "It won't be much longer."

It's a different kind of medicine—maybe it qualifies as a miraculous cure. It starts inside me before I hear the baby cry, before I even hear flesh slapping flesh, before I know if the baby's made like me or made like Carol or made like something that would feel at home in one of Sara's catfish ponds. Something's growing inside me, about to burst out.

"You'll feel pressure," the nurse says. "Your baby's about to be born."

I squeeze Carol's hand, and she squeezes mine. I'm watching the top of the curtain, waiting for them to hold the baby up, but I can scarcely see. It's as if I'm looking through a sheet of rain. Tears are streaming down my face. They're salty, like sweat.

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HAROLD FROMM

Scholarship as Opera: Foucault's Woodnotes Wilde

The writings and now the life of Michel Foucault, like the writings and then the life of Oscar Wilde, have functioned as stones casting ripples upon the ideological waters of increasingly turbulent societies. In both cases, perverse, quixotic, and destabilizing works of a highly rhetorical and aesthetic character have been complemented by personal exposures that triggered radical revaluations of each author and his milieu. As Karl Beckson tells us about *The Importance of Being Earnest*, "On the surface, *Earnest* presents culturally approved heterosexual love in a farcical web of intrigue. . . . [but] the play also has subtle indications of Wilde's own sexual preoccupations,"[1] so James Miller tells us that what "seems forced historically, and arbitrary philosophically [in Foucault's nonetheless influential *Madness and Civilization*], makes sense as an esoteric, essentially autobiographical allegory."[2] Just as the clever, highly stylized social criticism of Wilde was followed by a sensational trial involving accusations of sodomy and general perversion ("gross indecency between males") so the equally stylized historico-philosophical tracts of Foucault have been followed by revelations of his intemperate participation in the weird paraphernalia of sado-masochistic gay bathhouse life in the California of the 1970s and early 1980s. Except that now, in our post-Nietzschean era, the whole question of what is weird and not weird, permissible and impermissible, is up for grabs, a question whose stresses and strains are clearly visible in Miller's open-minded but nervous account.

[1] LONDON IN THE 1890s: A Cultural History, by *Karl Beckson*. W.W. Norton & Co. $27.50.

[2] THE PASSION OF MICHEL FOUCAULT, by *James Miller*. Simon & Schuster. $27.50. This book has been so widely and well reviewed that it seems pointless to go over the basics once again. Mark Lilla's essay in the *TLS* of March 26, 1993 and Alan Ryan's in the *New York Review of Books* of April 8, 1993 are exemplary.

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Didier Eribon's 1989 biography, which appeared in the U.S. in 1991, was the first full-scale attempt to set the events of Foucault's life before us in some order and density.[3] As a source book of information to serve as prolegomena to any future biography it is quite successful, and Eribon is aware of the paradox involved in writing a biography about someone who "challenge[d] the notion of the author, thereby dismissing the very possibility of a biographical study." As a biography, however, it is almost entirely without narrative skill, even allowing for what might conceivably be lost in translation from the French, and it avoids most of the philosophic and introspective considerations that are nowadays requirements for any serious literary distinction in this genre.

James Miller, who has made good use of Eribon's groundwork, tells us at once that his book is not a biography but, rather, "a narrative account of one man's lifelong struggle to honor Nietzsche's gnomic injunction, 'to become what one is,'" in effect a cross between biography and intellectual history. Miller, like Eribon, is aware of the problem involved in writing about a person who dismissed selves and authors as fictions, but since Foucault characterized even his own writings as fictions Miller has decided to "state explicitly what 'game of truth,' to borrow Foucault's phrase, I think I am playing." This game turns out to be the fairly conventional procedure of gathering and checking evidence and trying to come to valid conclusions, while recognizing the chimerical nature of "truth." Lest this seem an unexceptionably sensible approach, it's worth calling attention to a protest by David M. Halperin, who objects that Miller "purports to 'explain' Foucault's thought by tracing its origin to the 'truth' of his sexuality, thereby combining authoritative psychological/biographical knowledge with the power of normalizing judgment in a single gesture whose effect is to strengthen the very disciplinary controls that Foucault's whole life was dedicated to resist."[4] This sort of critical blackmail, in which conclusions you don't happen to like are dismissed as "normalizing judgment," gives some hint of the political terror-

[3] MICHEL FOUCAULT, by *Didier Eribon*. Trans. by Betsy Wing. Harvard University Press. $30.00; $14.95.

[4] David M. Halperin, "Bringing Out Michel Foucault," *Salmagundi*, Winter 1993, p. 71.

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ism behind contemporary cultural studies, where the politically correct gesture would be to apply congenial new standards of truth for each case (e.g., you can't say valid things about blacks unless you're black) and where the truly modest gesture would be silence. (Halperin, of course, has his own normalizing criteria. But as these derive from the margins and not from the center, they start out with a virtue that Miller's criteria lack, since one of Halperin's unexpressed criteria is that the margins are less culpable than the center, a current truism.)

Miller, however, despite his generally masterful narrative, had already swallowed a considerable draught of this terrorism of "victimology" before setting out, which brings to mind Foucault's claim (in *Discipline and Punish* and elsewhere) that modern techniques of social control (e.g., political correctness) have replaced physical force with brainwashing. As a result, Miller's treatment of Foucault is as open-minded as any reasonable person could wish (but then "reason" is also a contested concept and open-mindedness, beyond a certain point, can be hard to distinguish from mush). His basic decency can be seen in remarks such as: "That it is worth struggling for objectivity (problematic though this ideal obviously is) I take to be confirmed by the modern experience with unchecked myth-mongering: for example, in Russia between 1917 and 1989; and in Germany under Hitler." But because the insatiability of victimology requires that one should not only *allow* for diversity and multiplicity but should *venerate* every particular little marginal quirk, Miller's ambivalent though essentially positive treatment of Foucault was destined to have its enemies, inasmuch as no political ambivalence is permitted. In a shameless burst of normative judgment, I would even suggest that Miller is rather *too* positive.

Although his guiding thesis is never spelled out with absolute clarity, Miller seems to be saying that for Foucault to *become what he was* (to use the Nietzschean formulation), he needed to find a satisfactory way to incorporate his homosexuality, his sexual stimulation by violence and pain, and his obsession with death into his ordinary everyday life. The method, apparently, was to embrace "transgression" and "limit-experiences," the former consisting of a Zarathustrian overturning of conventional moral ideas and the latter consisting of sado-masochistic grati-

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fications. The "normalizing" to which David Halperin so strongly objects is, he says, that Miller's reading of Foucault's writings as a series of transgressive steps toward limit-experiences treats them as "symptomatic expressions of an underlying psychopathology that will unfailingly confirm his diagnosis." As reductive as this treatment may seem, however, any sensitive reader of Foucault's earlier writings was bound to have felt that underneath the extravagant rhetoric about madness, discourse formations, panoptical surveillance and so forth was a very suspect transgressive subtext indeed. (Of *Madness and Civilization* Miller remarks that "searching for the roots of his own mad fascination with death, he was creating a 'work' *of* madness, as well as *about* madness.") And if this subtext turned out to be erotic, then it was so much the less unusual, for had we not read Barthes, Forster, Wilde, Mishima, Whitman, not to mention Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and innumerable other allegorizers of subterraneous desire, some more driven and "pathological" than others?

So Miller, with his dazzling knowledge of Foucault's texts and milieu, has drawn out what we already sensed—by introducing Sade, Nietzsche, Bataille, Artaud, and a whole theater of cruelty and eroticism. He has powerfully reminded us that the preferred technique for defending non-normalized desire is to attack the normalizing repressivities of the institutions of control. (In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault writes that "all knowledge rests upon injustice," that "the instinct for knowledge is malicious.") And if most intellectuals have transgressed only on paper, there are an "heroic" few who transgress in life as well.

In the case of Foucault, the institutions of control were hospitals, insane asylums, prisons, the law, the medical profession, and language itself. These Foucault negotiated by means of an overheated gothic rhetoric. Speaking of the seventeenth century confinement of madmen and criminals in asylums, he writes:

> Here reason reigned in the pure state, in a triumph arranged for it [by social norms] in advance over a frenzied unreason. Madness was thus torn from that imaginary freedom which still allowed it to flourish on the Renaissance horizon. Not so long ago, it had

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> floundered about in broad daylight: in *King Lear*, in *Don Quixote*. But in less than a half-century, it had been sequestered and, in the fortress of confinement, bound to Reason, to the rules of morality and to their monotonous nights.[5]

And speaking of nineteenth century reforms in the treatment of the insane, he remarks: "[Samuel] Tuke created an asylum where he substituted for the free terror of madness the stifling anguish of responsibility; fear no longer reigned on the other side of the prison gates, it now raged under the seals of conscience."

This theme of the replacement of external force by conscience, self-discipline, and all-around superegoization runs through Foucault's writings almost until the end. It is an attack on normalization by someone who considered himself a victim of the repression stemming from society's "regime of truth" and its all-judging, all-constraining "gaze." The social power that makes this repression possible is the product of whatever "game" of truth happens to prevail. Although Foucault's Marxist phase was very brief, the influence of Althusser (who was for a time one of his academic colleagues) pervades his key ideas, such as discourse formations, epistemes, and games or regimes of truth. In sum, social truisms and ideologies as well as the knowledge produced by intellectual bureaucracies in the sciences and humanities (including theology) are unwitting "apparatuses" (to use Althusser's term) for social control and thus "malicious." What is striking about the scholarship whereby Foucault presents these ideas is not only that it has been widely criticized but that Foucault himself referred to it as fiction: "My book [*The Order of Things*] is a pure and simple fiction." Miller describes his works as "fictive genealogy" and speaks of his use of "'traditional mythic forms,' in order to compose essentially fictive histories to further the strategic aims of the author." He cites criticism of Foucault as a "new-wave sophist who bewitched his public with deceptive rhetoric and evaded the responsibilities of rigorous scholarship. . . . Historians have wondered what, if any, principles govern his selection of evidence," and Habermas speaks of his "crypto-normative

[5] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York, 1973), p. 64.

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pseudo-science." Mark Lilla, referring to *Madness and Civilization*, remarks, "Like all Foucault's books, it displays his proud will to ignorance, relying on extremely limited archival sources yet speaking in the magisterial register of World History." Alan Ryan comments that "the fame of Foucault's ideas rests on what makes them hard to accept—his talent for stating them in such extreme terms that they were literally incredible. . . . When they are made plausible by paraphrase, the claims lose their fizz." And Miller freely acknowledges that "Foucault would take a certain malicious glee in hiding his artistry behind a barrage of methodological pronouncements that endowed his work with a dazzling and deceptive air of scholarly authority." Foucault's books are allegories of desire and documents of *ressentiment*, autobiographical strategems in the new science of victimology by an obsessed and obsessive victim. Speaking of *Madness and Civilization*, he told a journalist that it was a means of "realizing direct, personal experiences." "I had had a personal, complex, and direct relationship with madness . . . and also with death."

How was it possible that these extravagantly operatic works of pseudo-scholarship by a nonetheless erudite and brilliant rhetorician have managed to exert so massive an influence on the character of postmodern intellectual life in the West? Even though his books seem unpersuasive, overstated, and driven by a sub-text of raging subjectivity and frustration, Foucault's sixties mentality was effective in mobilizing familiar Marxist and Freudian ideas in the rhetorical service of a newly emergent politics of victimology. The badmouthing of Enlightenment humanism by thinkers such as Heidegger (whom Foucault had read) and the attacks against repressive rationality by Frankfort school theorists such as Marcuse (in *One Dimensional Man* and *Eros and Civilization*) and Horkheimer and Adorno (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) cohered very well with the Althusserian ethos that was in the air for post-Sartrean French intellectuals. For them, it became fashionable (to quote Miller) to repudiate the "moralizing humanism" of Existentialism and the "'terrorism' of modern doctrines of moral responsibility." For them, to treat the insane benignly was, once again, to substitute "the stifling anguish of responsibility" for the "free terror of madness." Mere genteel tolerance of women, blacks, homosexuals, and many other victims was simply an extension

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of the benign repressivity against the insane and the criminal by whatever "regime of truth" was running the show. Once the notion prevailed that "rationality" (in the capitalist sense of total management) could subvert the proletariat through corporate control of production and consumption, Enlightenment Reason (with a capital R) could be seen to produce new forms of repression and subversion in other areas of "managed" social life as well. May of 1968 in France seems to have been the cataclysmic event that blew the lid off the boiling kettle. Foucault himself, up until then behaving like a rather conventional professor type, could now be seen dropping bricks on the heads of policemen from his position atop the barricades. But his more effective bricks turned out to be ideological, and his writings, however skewed, happened to be ready-to-hand for an era of social revolution.

Moreover, in the seventies and eighties the American academy became a lumber room for discarded Continental ideologies like Marxism and structuralism, embracing whatever new tropes, however fantastic, could aid couch revolutionaries in the production of the books and articles necessitated by fierce competition in a declining job market. "Quoted, imitated, travestied," Miller comments, "the 'enunciative' peculiarities of his 'discourse' became 'regularities.' As his trademark neologisms circulated ever more widely, flashed at academic conferences as a kind of off-the-rack fashion statement, Foucault's work became at last truly, and deeply, 'anonymous,' lost in the great 'murmur of discourses held today.'" The hysteric French mode, full of exaggeration, wild metaphors, fanciful similes, and sweeping radical political manifestoes (Foucault proclaimed the end of "man" as a humanist concept, the death of the author as a proprietary, conscious intention that produced writings) has now taken over even the once decorous pages of *PMLA*. Thus, in the current issue, Alan Nadel writes about "God's Law and the Wide Screen: *The Ten Commandments* as Cold War 'Epic.'"

> Inherently, the wide-screen format attempted to suggest the sublime through an overabundance of mundane details. The format manifested visually the rhetoric of American foreign policy during the cold war. Called "containment," the policy as inter-

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> preted by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles oxymoronically entailed "spreading" the American vision globally. Like the wide-screen camera, containment squeezed what the public saw into a format that could be accommodated and then projected that version of reality globally. And like the wide-screen format, American foreign policy . . . celebrated technological supremacy as the mandate for a theological and political vision.[6]

Although this preposterous prose is cooler than Foucault's, the parentage is not far to seek. Such writing represents the Triumph of Tropes in contemporary Western scholarship. Imagination, desire, and the political programmatics of frustrated intellectual Tamburlaines have won the day with the help of discourse formations, ideological state apparatuses, regimes of truth, and the whole waxworks of Foucaultian paranoia.

Somewhat warmer in rhetorical temperature is an article by Louis Marin about utopias in the current issue of *Critical Inquiry*, in this instance translated from the French, though American scholars have indisputably mastered the Gallic mode. Portions of Marin's piece could have been produced from a kit of the Every-Man-His-Own-Foucault Tinker Toy that has generated probably thousands of academic articles over the past twenty years. In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault provides a little disquisition about the Latin root of the word "monster," meaning "demonstrate" or "show," which he develops in connection with the early practice of displaying the inhabitants of madhouses as if they were monsters in a freak show or zoo; and in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault makes wildly exaggerated claims about Jeremy Bentham's *panopticon* as a model device for the continuous surveillance of prisoners and, by extension, of society as a whole. Swallowing these notions like consecrated wafers, Marin discusses the Sears Tower as a "monster" standing up against the background of Chicago: "*Monstrum* is that which shows itself and makes itself be seen in the stupefying obviousness of the wonder, of the incredible marvel. The highest tower in the world stands up against the twilight glow at the same time to warn and announce the marvelous," and so forth. *This* game of truth is so prepackaged it hardly seems

[6] *PMLA*, May 1993, p. 416.

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worth finishing the sentences. Only a page later, the inevitable *panopticon* rears its ugly head, as the spectator beholding Sears Tower "discovers that in the *imperium* constituted by the highest tower in the world . . . that is, in this *panopticon*, he is visible from everywhere, he is the object of a powerful and virtually omnipresent [wouldn't you know?] gaze."[7] (The number of papers delivered at Modern Language Association conventions whose titles contain the word "gaze" is topped only by the number containing the word "body," another word invested with Foucaultian aura.) When academics are not aping Foucault's rhetoric and neologisms, they are inventing portentous political interpretations of paintings, a practice that seems to have been started by Foucault's extended discourse on Velázquez's *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things* and institutionalized in America via Stephen Greenblatt's discourse on Holbein's *The Ambassador* in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, a book whose New Historicist fabrications owe yet another debt to Foucault.

Having passed through phases as conventional professor and then radical political activist—he was deeply involved in prison reform and supported the Ayatollah in the Iranian revolution, among other causes, but was relatively quiet about sex—Foucault entered his final phase after a visit to California in 1975 to teach at Berkeley. Taken to Death Valley by a freaked-out sixties groupie, he was persuaded to ingest LSD, an event, combined with visits to gay bathhouses in San Francisco, that transformed his life. "As a result of these [epiphanal] experiences," Miller reports, "Foucault's thought would take a dramatic new turn, transforming, in paradoxical and surprising ways, his continuing effort to illuminate what Nietzsche has called 'the riddle which man must solve'—the riddle of his own singular being." In a long and scholarly account of sado-masochistic bathhouse life in San Francisco, Miller describes everything from "leather cockrings" to "fistfucking," machinery of the "limit-experiences" that seem to have brought a peace of sorts to Foucault's tortured existence, a "homosexual ascesis" that enabled him to "come out" and to take on a public role in the movement for gay liberation. "All of Foucault's

[7] Louis Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present," *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1993, pp. 400, 402.

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'limit-experiences' . . . had dramatically confirmed his thesis that the body, like the soul, was in some sense socially constructed" and that possibilities of pleasure well beyond genital sexuality were worthy of being explored, a view, one might add that does not seem very different from Freud's notion of erogenous zones and polymorphous perversity. (But, to recall Alan Ryan's remark, much of the fizz is taken out of Foucault's ideas when they are restated.) "Michel Foucault was a man deeply attracted to power in its most totalitarian forms, politically and sexually," Edmund White told James Miller, and in some way this partially repressed, partially sublimated, and partially deflected inclination achieved resolution through his California experiences.

After 1975, Foucault revised his plans for the later volumes of his *History of Sexuality*. They became more restrained, more scholarly in a traditional way, less egregious than his earlier writing, seeming almost dull by comparison. Even more remarkable, after the bloodletting of the Ayatollah, "much of the French left—including Foucault, despite his momentary enthusiasm for the Iranian revolution—found itself embracing a kind of liberal (and chastened) vision of what politics might achieve, a vision given its most dramatic expression in the 'human rights' movement that was then still gathering momentum in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe." What is more, Miller implies that Foucault's involvement in French neoliberalism in the 1980s was connected to the resolution of his sexual conflicts during the California years following 1975. Moreover, his discovery of "friendship" during his last phase, after a life as a loner, prompts Miller to suggest that "the range of intimate relationships that most human beings take for granted seemed, from the philosopher's point of view, to require a Herculean act of will." It appears ironic indeed, given the thinly veiled sado-masochistic fantasies of his earlier writings, that Foucault should have been more or less straightened out emotionally by means of the real S/M thing in his final years, his intellect clarified and liberated from some of its gothic tics through an exorcism afforded by the literal enactment of his lifelong obsessions.

Although Miller's admiration for Foucault is judiciously held in check by his skeptical mentality throughout much of this

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accomplished and well-written book, we do learn from his Preface not only that "Michel Foucault is one of the representative men—and outstanding thinkers—of the twentieth century," but that there is "the possibility that Foucault, in his radical approach to the body and its pleasures, was in fact a kind of visionary; and that in the future, once the threat of AIDS has receded, men and women, both straight and gay, will renew, without shame or fear, the kind of corporeal experimentation that formed an integral part of his own philosophical quest." By the time one has reached the end of Miller's book, however, this overarching assessment of Foucault seems not only unsupported by any information in the book itself but extremely bizarre. If resolving one's personal problems—after the sublimations of tortured philosophic writing have failed to do so—by mastering a technique for twisting your fist up someone's anus is what it takes to become a great philosopher, then perhaps Foucault is indeed a "morbid and vaguely mystical" visionary. But his remarks to the effect that sex is worth dying for and "To die for the love of boys: What could be more beautiful?" don't inspire much confidence. (Not that dying for the love of girls would strengthen the case in any way.) If Sadean "transgression" and Nietzschean "becoming what one is" can't produce anything more impressive for mankind than Foucault's California epiphany, the mountains have once again labored only to produce another ridiculous little mouse. As Richard Rorty put it, with his characteristic insight and humanity, "If we do have to fall back on this [sexual] alternative, however, we can see all the more clearly why we should not hope to get a new *politics* out of Foucault. Politics is supposed to include, and help, all those people who *do* find happiness thinkable, who save limit-experiences for occasional weekends, and who do not share Foucault's interest in death. Contempt for these people is not a good beginning for political deliberation." Nor does Rorty believe "that Foucault formulated a 'brave and basic challenge' to our sense of right and wrong."[8] Foucault's belief that experiencing the truth about himself (very curious for someone who did not believe in truth, essences, or selves) might produce (to quote Miller who then

[8] Richard Rorty, "Paroxysms and Politics," *Salmagundi*, Winter 1993, pp. 66, 67.

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quotes Foucault) "a different kind of man with a different kind of soul, and a different kind of body, 'utterly new, utterly beautiful,'" is pretty jejune stuff, to say the least, and would be embarrassing even from some moonstruck adolescent awash in testosterone. "After all," Miller writes, "if one's *bios* had been fashioned like an artwork that would express 'the *transcendens* pure and simple,' there could be no more fitting capstone to this work, particularly in dark times, than the free embrace of a beautiful death [from AIDS]." But if this is to be understood as James Miller's considered reflection on the life of Michel Foucault, then I fear that his own casualty as a victim of victimology becomes only too painfully apparent.

Miller's announcement in his early pages of a position of skeptical antifoundationalism has, as things turn out, not precluded his acceptance of the foundations of today's politically correct pretense of openness to everything. That Miller is, in fact, *not* open to everything is made obvious enough by his objections to the regimes of Stalin and Hitler, which I have quoted earlier. But to object to Stalin and Hitler is now pretty safe, whereas to cast doubts about the transcendent rewards for humankind of "fistfucking" might leave one open to savage assaults by the gourmandizing avant-garde. (I would regard with equal skepticism any transcendent political and ethical claims even for routine sexual intercourse.)

As far as the personal gratifications of other people are concerned, it makes little difference to me what they choose, as long as no one is seriously hurt. That Foucault chose boys may or may not have bearing upon the nature of his writings as philosophy or politics, though Miller quotes Foucault as saying that "the key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos." In keeping with this pronouncement, what Miller essentially is judging is the quality of the whole package, of the books and the life combined. Although the books are seriously flawed and contributed to the incubation of the disease now known as political correctness, Foucault's insights were sometimes brilliant, as in his general suspicion (though not his alone) of the ways in which interest groups make their interests seem natural or the ways in which discourse forma-

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tions legitimize the exertion of power. But more indeed would be required for him to be seen as a great benefactor of humankind and no one but a madman would agree to put himself into the hands of such a person.

Not only is it clear that Foucault's life and writings were a form of opera—it's even clear what opera Foucault was always singing: unmistakably, it was *Salome.* In this overwhelming masterpiece by Richard Strauss, with text taken from Oscar Wilde, today's Queer Studies (as they call it) would doubtless regard Salome herself as an open-and-shut case of Wilde in drag. GIVE ME THE HEAD OF JOKANAAN! Salome screams, as the Straussian orchestra thunders its orgiastic punctuations of her desire. I WANT THE HEAD OF JOKANAAN! she moans and shrieks. "Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well, I will kiss it now," she croons to the severed head on a platter, as the soldiers of Herod crush her to death under their shields.

Today, for his lecherous sexism, Herod would be crushed under the shields of ACT UP, and Salome, having the courage of her kinks and the spunk of telling society to go screw itself, would probably wander off with her girlfriend to enjoy some new Foucaultian limit-experience. It's all immense fun, if you like that sort of thing. But it will take some persuading to convince me that Salome was a great guru of personkind. For now, I just don't believe it.

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JOHN HAINES

Hotel Laundromat

My plane has landed . . . It must be Egypt,
and night has arrived in an ark
of bullrushes. The doorman grimaces,
announcing the name of a city
sprinkled with shoddy crumbs—
Why, it's Nashville, but I'll just
pretend it's Vienna, Budapest,
or Cairo—anywhere but America!

Would you believe it? My red notebook
lies on the white counterpane
here beside me. I have just written
another poem, and it tickles me
how the words sit there on the page,
already famous and buoyant with life.

My typewriter (borrowed from the management)
sleeps under its lovely blue towel.
No lines will be blotted there tonight,
nor tomorrow either—you know,
I never learned that little trick of composure!
And over the table where my eyeglasses
are slyly winking at me
I see the city I have confused
with another, and beyond it
the tomb where the Pharaoh
will be serving Brunch tomorrow.

Ach! My toe aches . . . The sky's the limit!
And woe to you with your pink balloon,
Mister! For now the Baron Stumpfnagle
rides the ferris wheel in the Volksprater.
And I too am turning there

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with Anna, dear pregnant Anna,
and her voice rings in the drawing room
where the cataract
of the Nile has been silenced.

And now it is Abdul Nasser's turn
to laugh: "Harruumph! Har, Har! . . . "
While Sholom turns another page
in the history of thieves;
and I too turn my page
in the book I am reading—
the one I have written,
the only one worth reading
in this age of ninnies . . .
And it is dark still, and the bed
is white, and the cover
of my notebook red as blood.

Blood! Sam Spade has done it!
And he shall answer for it,
as I too shall answer when you call me,
though nothing whatever
makes sense on the sheet of paper
I have folded and mailed to you.

Ask the Great Dane next door
what all of this means—Go on, ask him!
It's Basker, the Hound of the Steppe.
And his ferris wheel too
has stopped, and he lies there
licking his paw, with a sideways look
in his eye, as if asking:
"Who in the hell are you,
and what are you looking at?"

Lie still, Basker, I was just passing . . .
You with your precious vigilance
and your unspeakable temper,
guarding the Pharaoh's tomb!

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RICHARD HORNBY

Regional Theatre Comes of Age

IN THE BEGINNING, AMERICAN THEATRE was entirely regional. By the early nineteenth century, despite widespread antagonism from religious and political leaders, every major city in America had its own resident stock company. Actors were hired by the season to do a wide repertory, which could include pirated European plays (there were as yet no international copyright laws), Shakespeare, and original American plays. Few of these last have survived, of which only a handful have any lasting value; the writers were poorly paid, their output seen only as ephemeral diversion. Nonetheless, we did once have regional playwrights.

As Bruce McConachie has pointed out in his superb new book, *Melodramatic Formations*, the great turning point in American theatre history occurred during the 1870s. A severe depression caused many stock companies to go bankrupt; as conditions improved, managers tended to hire actors by the individual play, rather than for a season of repertory. A major reason was the developing star system, in which stars were seen as extraordinary personalities who did not change from play to play but instead used plays as vehicles to display themselves. Stars were reluctant to tie themselves down to a stock company; it was easier, and more lucrative, to play long runs, which could include touring the country, using the new railroads. New York became the center of American theatre; stock companies all but disappeared, with regional theatres merely booking a succession of touring plays.

Although the long run of individual plays became common in other countries, stock companies continued to flourish simultaneously, with beneficial results both in playwriting and in acting. Producers are more likely to do new, adventurous plays when they can spread the risk over an entire season; actors are more likely to develop as artists when they can play a wide range of roles. In New York, however, attempts to revive a repertory system, which began in the twenties, led mostly to a series of sad, well-publicized failures.

In the forties and fifties, there were attempts to recreate stock companies outside New York, with troupes like Arena Stage in Washington and the Alley Theatre in Houston. The regional theatre movement expanded in the sixties, most notably with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, the Dallas Theatre Center, Seattle Repertory, and Long Wharf Theatre

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in New Haven. Such companies, although all nonprofit, were more often driven by a spirit of civic boosterism than a commitment to art. Few even attempted true repertory, and all remained New York centered; actors are hired, mostly in New York, for the individual play. The plays chosen have consisted of standard classics plus recent Broadway and off-Broadway hits.

In recent years, there have been signs of maturation, at long last, in our regional theatres. There is still no major theatre in the United States that performs true repertory—i.e., a large number of plays on a revolving basis. Some companies have developed a stable pool of local actors, though few are hired for an entire season. But the quality of productions has been rising—better, on average, than on Broadway, where slack acting and slapdash directing have become appallingly common. And, lo and behold, some regional theatre companies are performing original plays. The Humana Festival at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, for example, does *only* new American plays.

The best new work, however, has been coming out of larger theatres, moving around an informal regional theatre circuit. Robert Schenkkan's *Kentucky Cycle*, which began at Seattle's Intiman Theatre and moved to the Mark Taper Forum in L.A., in 1992 became the first play in history to win the Pulitzer Prize without a New York production. Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, which began at the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco and also moved to the Taper, became the second a year later. Recently, the Minneapolis Theatre de la Jeune Lune took its magnificent production of *Children of Paradise: Shooting a Dream* to Yale Repertory, and then to the La Jolla Playhouse.

All three plays and their productions are triumphs of nonprofit financing. With their large casts, elaborate settings and lighting, and considerable length (from three and a half to seven hours), they are anything but modest, low-budget theatre. Unlike the typical Broadway non-musical play these days, with its small cast and narrow psychological focus, these plays are historic in scope (even *Angels in America*, though set in the eighties, has historical perspective) and sociopolitical in emphasis. For the first time since O'Neill, we have playwrights who think *big*. Their plays are Brechtian Epic Theatre in the best sense, not only because of their physical size and bold performance style, but because of the important issues they raise.

The Kentucky Cycle has yet to reach Broadway; its opening is scheduled for November. *Angels in America* opened in May, and immediately won a Tony Award for best play. The production had changed since the one I had seen at the Taper in the fall (see *The Hudson Review*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1, Spring 1993), and not for the better. George C. Wolfe, a hot young director whose only problem is an utter lack of talent (he has also been named as new head of the New York Shakespeare Festival), took over from Oskar Eustis, who had guided the production and worked with the playwright for years.

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As a result of the change in command, the play lost some of the flamboyance and clarity it had had in L.A. Part of the problem was the Walter Kerr Theatre, which has too small a stage for an Epic piece. (Perhaps this is appropriate, since Kerr, a mediocre theatre critic, disliked Brecht.) But Robin Wagner's settings were tame, with the dream sequences much scaled down. Wolfe's direction, as usual, was awkward; for example, one scene calls for the play's two couples to have arguments simultaneously, in their two homes, each squabble commenting on the other. Eustis staged these, obviously enough, on different sides of the stage, but Wolfe put one scene behind the other! The result looked like Times Square with the traffic signals out of order. I cannot think of another big-name director with such a poor sense of focus as Wolfe's.

Nevertheless, the glories of *Angels in America*, the best American play in thirty years, still managed to shine through. Most of the original actors were still in the cast, including the magnificent Ron Leibman, who won a Tony Award for his outrageous, manic performance as Roy Cohn. This portrayal itself is another sign of the maturation of the American regional theatre; New York acting, dominated for forty years by the Actors Studio, remains introspective and naturalistic, which is fine for plays that are appropriate to such a style, but which evaporates when broad strokes are called for. I cannot imagine a New York production with performances as unrestrained as Leibman's; indeed, there were inevitable rumblings from New York theatre people that his performance lacked subtlety, which is like complaining that Charlie Chaplin's movies lacked clever dialogue.

Perhaps the reason for the strong, daring performances we see in these regional theatre productions is their companies' long experience doing the classics, which are full of bold, non-naturalistic roles. With the Minneapolis Theatre de la Jeune Lune, the vigorous style comes not only from classical experience, but from direct connections with the best in contemporary French theatre. In 1971, two Minnesotans, Barbra Berlovitz Desbois and Robert Rosen, went to Paris to study at the prestigious Ecole Jacques Lecoq. At the school they met native Frenchmen Dominique Serrand and Vincent Gracieux, with whom they eventually teamed on a Parisian production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Their theatre company went on to alternate seasons in Paris and Minneapolis, performing Shakespeare, Brecht, and Molière first in French and then in English. For financial reasons, they eventually stuck to Minneapolis, where they recently converted an old warehouse into a permanent theatre.

Children of Paradise: Shooting a Dream is an expansive theatre piece based on the making of the Marcel Carné film classic, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, during the waning years of World War II. The play was written by company members Steven Epp, Felicity Jones, Dominique Serrand (who also directed, and played Carné!), and Paul Walsh. It has the loose, episodic structure characteristic of collaborative play-

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writing, held together not by plot but by themes, especially of the nature of artistic creation, the function of art, and the relation of art to politics.

In the play, Carné sees himself as apolitical, driven only by his obsessive artistic vision. Politics and the war inevitably intrude, however. Wartime austerity causes shortages and interruptions; at times the shooting is even stopped for air raids. Members of the cast and crew, active in the resistance, are arrested by the Gestapo; when the Germans are defeated, politics turn around, so that other members are arrested as collaborators, including the great actress Arletty. Through it all, the filming manages to continue, resulting in a cinematic masterpiece; the artistic impulse is depicted as inexorable.

Plays within plays are common drama, but *Children* manages to be a play about a film, which is in turn about theatre. Carné and his screenwriter, the poet Jacques Prévert, developed a script set in the early nineteenth century, dealing with the great romantic actor Frederick Lemaître and the popular Théâtre des Funambules. At the time, the French cultural elite supported the Comédie-Française and the Opera, which enjoyed official sanction and legal monopolies. The popular theatres like the Funambules were in constant trouble with the authorities; moreover, their broad, pantomimic style was exactly opposite to the restrained, oratorical performances (much more refined than has ever existed in any English-speaking theatre) of the official theatres. Thus, within the film, there are conflicts between art and politics that are mirrored in the play about the filmmaking. A "refined," official art that makes no contact with ordinary people is ultimately an instrument of oppression, or at least a collaborator with it. The problem, as presented in the outer play, is whether Carné's film was official art, pandering to the ruling Nazis and their puppet Vichy government, or was slyly subversive. When it first appeared, the film was attacked as apolitical and escapist, but also praised as a tribute to the French imagination. Over the years, the latter view has prevailed, but like all great works of art *Les Enfants du Paradis* cannot be easily pigeonholed. The film is as full of contradictions and paradoxes as was the period of the Occupation itself, which turned Frenchmen against Frenchmen, and from which France has never fully recovered.

The metatheatrical implications of the film within the play, and the role-playing within the film, are enhanced by the role-playing within the cast and crew, and within French society generally. "No one is what they seem," complains Carné. "It's all light and deception." Gestapo agents pose as French, and arrest two crew members. There are informers and collaborators in the cast, but also resistance members pretending to be apolitical. The ending of the play consists of the trials of collaborators, another kind of popular theatrical performance, with actors now cast in roles against their will. But the ultimate play-within-the-play features Carné himself, playing a role

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that even he does not understand, as director of a huge, expensive, elusive masterpiece at what would seem the worst possible time.

Dominique Serrand, with his agile face and body, and slim, angular features, seemed quintessentially French in the role of Carné, contrasted by Vincent Gracieux as Prévert, round and coarse-looking, another classic French type. These two set the tone for the entire cast of 21, all lithe and vigorous, reflecting the work at the Lecoq Institute. (Lecoq's work, incorporating mime, masks, and Commedia dell'Arte, is a direct lineal descendant of Lemaître and the Funambules, which adds a further layer of irony to the play.) I was less happy with the vocal work—Felicity Jones moved with feline suppleness as Arletty, but spoke in a monotonous whine that was at best a parody of Arletty's sexy purr. Also, the French members of the cast spoke with accents (particularly strong in the case of Gracieux), while the American members did not. Nevertheless, there was a splendid unity to the large cast, the result of long work together, the uniform acting style, and, most of all, their thorough familiarity with and love of France, its culture, and its history.

The performance of the play began on the theatre's loading dock, meant to represent the nineteenth-century Parisian Boulevard du Temple (popularly known as the "Boulevard du Crime"), the nineteenth-century center of popular entertainment, with cast members portraying the actors of the time and we audience members the working-class Parisians. The metatheatrical concept no doubt worked well at the Minneapolis warehouse, but alas, the La Jolla Playhouse is situated in the beautiful, sylvan campus of the University of California, San Diego, so that the contrast between the magic of theatre and the grime and stench of the street became homogenized. As we moved into the playhouse itself, however, walking across the stage to get to our seats, the overt theatricality of the piece became both powerful and distanced. The scenery (designed by Gracieux—this company, like its Funambules model, is not one for specialization or rarefied aestheticism), simplified yet atmospheric, consisted mostly of two-dimensional cutouts positioned against the plain, unchanging stage. The costumes, designed by Trina Mrnak, were meticulously in period, however, right down to shoes and underwear, while the props impressively included period movie equipment. The lighting, designed by Frederic Desbois (husband of one of the actresses), used high contrast, including bold side lighting, to create the ambience of a movie set. The resultant mixture of history, drama, philosophy, and spectacle was a superb example of Epic Theatre, which only a few years ago I never expected to find in an original play in the United States.

Ordinarily, the words "one-person show" are enough to send me running in the opposite direction. They usually imply nothing more than a cheap star vehicle—the management does not have to pay a

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supporting cast, but still gets to charge top ticket prices. A one-person show also usually implies lazy playwriting—excerpting some famous person's letters or some famous novel is easy work, yet, again, pays as well as or more than a real play. To these implications we can nowadays add pretentiousness; monologuists are called "performance artists," who, by being nonliterary, tasteless, and self-indulgent, become automatically more hip and sought-after than mere actors or playwrights.

Thus, when Anna Deavere Smith opened her one-woman show, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in June, I was not eager to see it. Smith had made her name as a performance artist by doing interviews with Americans across the country, and then performing their words in a series of pieces called *On the Road: A Search for American Character*, in a number of regional theatres. Using the same technique of turning interviews into monologues, she performed *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities*, both off-Broadway and on PBS television, portraying the conflicts in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, between blacks and Hassidic Jews. I did not see any of the earlier pieces; her method struck me as a gimmick. Smith enthusiasts seemed unable to answer the inevitable "So what?" question: Why is a human tape recorder better than an electronic one?

Twilight, like *Fires*, deals with urban conflict, in this case the L.A. riots of April 1992. Smith interviewed hundreds of Los Angeleans involved in or affected by the riot (the latter group including almost everybody), and ended up performing 27 of them, including Reginald Denny, Police Chief Daryl F. Gates, and a wide range of others, rich and poor, black, white, Latino, and Asian. Rodney King apparently declined to be included, but his Aunt, Angela King, was interviewed and made the cut, as did an anonymous Simi Valley juror.

As Smith began her performance, I still felt dubious as to the point of it all. Why not simply edit the taped interviews to create a typically earnest PBS show, letting the people speak for themselves? But Smith's style of performance won me over. On the one hand, she does not, like a nightclub impressionist, transform herself totally into each character, but on the other hand, she does not, like a television reporter, just detachedly quote the characters' words. Her performances are fully energized, seeming to be driven from within. Using a simple bit of costume—a baseball cap, a tie, a floral skirt—as an emblem of each person, she reproduces the person's accent, rhythms, and body language, but always remains herself, a tall, striking, but not beautiful black woman. She becomes both herself *and* the character, a perfect example of the kind of "alienated" performance that Brecht called for, making the character distanced, strange, highlighted. The sincere but bland quality that occurs when someone is interviewed on TV was replaced by a heightened resonance; these all-too-familiar Los Angeleans became historic figures.

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The historicism was heightened by the scrupulous neutrality that Smith maintained toward the characters, who represented the entire political spectrum. Whether depicting a gun store owner or a gunshot victim, she presented the person's words with complete sincerity, without any comment or non-verbal innuendo. Even her performance of Police Chief Gates, the most lampoonable figure in L.A. history, was simple and affecting. It remained for us, the audience, to ponder these figures and sort out our feelings toward them. The piece became a vehicle for the conception of our crazy city and its troubles, offering no solutions, but exposing all ideologies, confusions, and contradictions. Despite being performed by a single person, *Twilight* was similar to the other historical, regional theatre plays I had been reviewing, with a large number of characters, historical scope, and an extroverted acting style. It is yet another example of how regional theatre in America has finally come of age.

Jon Robin Baitz's *Three Hotels*, performed by New York's Circle Repertory Company in May, tells the story of a top executive in an international corporation (modeled on Nestlé) that sells infant formula in third world countries. The stuff kills so many babies that it might as well be poison. The executive, though raised in an American Communist family and a former Peace Corps member, has risen in the company because of his amoral ruthlessness. He has been particularly good at dumping people from the company who express the slightest moral compunctions.

The executive's job naturally involved living for long periods abroad. At one point, his son was stabbed to death by a robber on the beach at Rio. Some years later, back in the United States, his wife was asked to speak to other executive wives about to go abroad. During her lecture, she broke down, denouncing the company for its disgusting product, the death of her son, the transformation of her husband (the son's death turned her husband into "an Albert Speer type," ruthlessly promoting a deadly product in apparent revenge on third-world people), and the breakdown of her marriage. As a result of this speech, the executive was unceremoniously fired; the company can be just as ruthless with him as he had been with others.

To say that the play "tells the story" of the executive is literally true. *Three Hotels* is entirely in narrative form, in three retrospective monologues, two by the husband and one by the wife, in three foreign hotels. The result is to make a fascinating, timely, challenging story into something deadly dull. If the regional theatre plays discussed above represent the best in contemporary American playwriting, this represents the typically inept. Narrative has a place in drama, of course; it is even possible to make an entire play out of it, as with the Anna Deavere Smith piece. Nevertheless, although Smith's characters talked about the past, the focus was on the present, as we examined them as individuals; their stories were not nearly as important as their

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attitudes, beliefs, and mannerisms. In *Three Hotels*, the focus is instead on the story (which is in fact a good one), which the playwright is too lazy to tell through action. I would have loved, for example, to have seen the wife's lecture itself, rather than her pensive recollection of it, or to have seen the husband ruthlessly confront some of the troubled executives whom he fired. Why use the dramatic form, which involves the actors' living presence, if everything of interest happened in the past? Why bother to stage something that the audience could just as easily read for themselves?

Joe Mantello directed adequately (in between performing a starring role in *Angels in America* in L.A. and New York!), while Christine Lahti and Ron Rifkin performed with grace and intelligence. But what a waste. Back to your desk, Mr. Baitz! Learn something about good dramaturgy from your regional theatre contemporaries.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

Of Patrons and Painters

THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO COLLECT ART ON A GRAND SCALE—"proud possessors," in Aline Saarinen's felicitous phrase—are a diverse, complex, and probably undefinable group. Ferdinand Howald, who amassed a superb American modernist collection of Marins, Demuths, and Hartleys (which he eventually gave to the museum in Columbus, Ohio, putting that institution on the map) was a shy, gentle, enigmatic man; J.P. Morgan was a notorious tyrant and thug. Duncan Phillips was the classic Old World gentleman-aesthete; Katherine Dreier, who gave her great Dada holdings to Yale, was a Prussian schoolmarm. Some contemporary collectors I have met have the manner and tact of discount store buyers, while others—a dwindling number—esteem the artists they deal with and would cut out their tongues before referring to their cherished artworks as "good investments." But, gracious or greedy, knowledgeable or trend-obsessed, where would we be without these people? Artists have bills to pay, museum acquisition funds are more limited than ever, and state support of the arts is a political and logistical nightmare. For better or worse, the millionaire patron will be a feature of our art world for a long time to come.

The alpha and omega of this breed were on review this year in two of the more prominent museum exhibitions of 1993: the Havemeyer show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Barnes Collection show at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. First, Mr. Barnes. Rude, pompous, self-centered, and condescending, he was the kind of man who took pleasure in belittling his mousey wife in front of other people and kept a mental "enemies list" of prodigious length. He was probably one of the nastiest, most manipulative people you would want to meet. The two biographies of him I have read are chronicles of stupefying ego and pettiness. But Albert C. Barnes, pharmaceutical tycoon and self-made man, understood a few things that very few people involved with aesthetic experience in America have *ever* got right. Long before Walter Benjamin pronounced on the subject, he knew that great works of art have an aura endangered by overexposure or the wrong kind of exposure, a meaningfulness and specialness known only through firsthand experience. He knew that schools and museums have no particular interest in safeguarding this aura. He knew that a love of art has nothing to do with numbers of students or spectators, easy access, bite-size wall plaques, and tidy

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categories; it has to do with individual desire, hard work, spiritual need, and some integrity and resolve on the part of the viewer. A little like the curmudgeonly Alfred Stieglitz, he understood that life in the twentieth century was probably going to demean the whole process of savoring original paintings and sculptures by turning it into a generic mass-market enterprise. (How prescient these fears were is evident today in the vast number of dreary one-of-every-big-name museum collections we have in the United States—and the fact that if you can't make it to the city in question, no matter; the catalogue, the video tape, the right posters and postcards will do.) Hence, Albert C. Barnes as the ultimate autodidact, instructing his countrymen by means of his own books (heavy-handed if well-intentioned) and even more by the style of his own small, high-caliber museum, an amazing place that for years admitted only those people Barnes felt had a genuine interest in the art, a gallery that had no truck with loan shows and snappy reproductions. Aura, specialness, was everything.

Well, Barnes is long dead, the building in Pennsylvania needs renovating, and the stipulations of any man's will are ultimately breakable. The exhibition of eighty works entitled "Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation: Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Early Modern," which travels to the Musée D'Orsay, the Tokyo Museum of Western Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art before returning home to suburban Merion, would have left this collector wild with anger—not only at the removal of the works from his museum but at the narrowness of the focus. (Barnes believed, refreshingly, in grouping works on the basis of an aesthetic common ground rather than by genre, nationality, or chronology. One room in the Barnes building, for instance, mixes African sculptures, Picasso heads, Modigliani portraits, and watercolors by Charles Demuth.) Still, given the inevitable "blockbuster" choices that any participating museums were going to opt for and given the fact that the Barnes Foundation needs the money, there isn't much point in complaining. What we saw was a choice sampler of what an expert eye and a large bank account could acquire before the Depression: Renoir nudes, Monet bateaux, some of the best Cézannes in America, Picassos from the Blue and Rose periods, Matisse's *Le bonheur de vivre* (1905), Seurat's models, Lautrec's *Rosa La Rouge* (1887) and one of Van Gogh's six portraits of the postman Joseph-Etienne Roulin. We were also able to see in this show, judicious in its size and spacing of the paintings, the newly discovered and restored *Unfinished Dance Mural* by Henri Matisse, on loan from the estate of Pierre Matisse, as a companion work to the exuberant *Merion Dance Mural*, which the artist finished in 1933 to fit into the lunettes above the French windows in Barnes's museum. A better introduction to what is meant by High Modernism would be hard to imagine.

Barnes's taste was in its way eclectic, and it developed over time—two statements that could not be made of all significant collectors. Aided by the American painters William Glackens and Alfred Mau-

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rer, he moved from an early interest in academic French painting to a fascination with the structural experiments of Cézanne and the controlled sensuality of Matisse—an iffy territory for Americans before the thirties. But that wasn't the end of it for Barnes, who may have suspected that he was alert to the best and the brightest before most of his peers but still wanted to explore the byways of the new art. His interest was genuine; making the right moves mattered less than following his own legitimate curiosity. As a result, the Barnes collection includes paintings by the inimitable Henri Rousseau, surely a minority taste in his time, and the distorting, blood-obsessed, almost frenzied Chaim Soutine. Soutine's *The Skinned Rabbit*, a vigorous rendering of a splayed carcass, would look out of place in this context to someone who didn't know better. Barnes, on his own, recognized the wondrous Soutine as a modern-day Daumier, a poet of the grotesque. If he had an almost uncritical appreciation of Renoir, Barnes also appreciated the widening of the idea of "the beautiful" that contemporary painters were exploring.

One misses the weirdness of seeing these great pictures *in situ*—the odd, almost homey quality of the rooms in Merion, the unexpected juxtapositions, the guards following you everywhere noisily switching on and off the lights as you enter or leave each room, the inconvenience of finding the building in suburban Philadelphia and getting your name on the reservation list. But any occasion to honor this unusual man—even, ironically, one that subverts some of his ideas (all those color reproductions! everything but the shopping bags)—is in this day and age a worthy endeavor. In meanness and temper, in seriousness and insight, we will not see his like again.

The Havemeyers were a different kettle of fish entirely. They would have been nice people to know personally (unlike Albert C. Barnes), though you would have to have known Mrs. Havemeyer pretty well to get a look at their fleshiest Courbet nudes—those were kept out of sight in a private sitting room. Prudishness aside, H.O. and Louisine Havemeyer were two remarkable people. They are examples of the unpredictable kind of collector and patron; there is simply nothing in their background, no psychological quirks or will to power, to suggest that they would have been as quietly voracious as they turned out to be in the pursuit of excellent paintings. Nor, given their un-Barnes-like lack of interest in aesthetic theory, is the quality and breadth of their collecting explicable. True, they had Mary Cassatt acting as an artistic guide and purchasing advisor, but having the right friends doesn't explain such a treasure, either. This "best and wisest collection in America," in the words of Barnes himself, is the core of the greatness of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a kind of miracle that defies understanding, and as such was a fitting subject for a full-scale exhibition. There is always something cloying and intellectually dubious about museums devoting scholarly attention to collectors as opposed to artists and objects—the vulture masquerading

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as objective historian, in the case of most large institutions—but with the Havemeyers, the usual reservations don't apply. New York City owes them as much homage as it does to Frederick Olmsted and Calvert Vaux or any ten politicians or writers.

"Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection" began with a gallery that introduced viewers to the tone of the collectors' home, a Tiffany showpiece built between 1889 and 1892 at 1 East 66th Street. Successive galleries, following a one-room survey of the collection, focused on the areas of interest husband and wife shared, or developed on their own. Mr. Havemeyer's library was an enclave of Old Masters from Bronzino to Rembrandt, Hals, and de Hooch. The Spanish room featured Goya and El Greco; there were twenty-five Corots in the room devoted to French art before Impressionism; other galleries were devoted to Islamic art, Japanese prints, Italian Renaissance majolica. And all this before the Mary Cassatt influence which led the Havemeyers to the initially confusing Edgar Degas and the major figures of Impressionism on through to Cézanne. Many of the best paintings in the show were well-known to regular visitors to the Metropolitan, but what everyone may not have known when savoring those works over the years was how many of them originated with this one dignified, generous couple. A secondary benefit of the show was the chance to see pictures the Havemeyers purchased which did not end up as part of the Metropolitan bequest in 1929, a sizeable bounty on its own. In this too-large exhibition, everything was not of equal quality, naturally—and it was interesting to learn that several of the Goyas the Havemeyers bought are now regarded as fakes—but even that fact makes its own point. The collector as investor or showman is eternally nervous about his "mistakes." (Anyone remember Sylvester Stallone's suit against his art advisor when his collection was sneered at in print?) Even the collector as scholar worries that he might be tripped up at some point. The collector as lover just keeps on looking, buying, loving—and in the end gives it all away on departing this life, trusting that his eye and his affection will overshadow those decisions later called "mistakes."

Henry O. Havemeyer had no distinguishing persona (proof that one is not needed to accomplish great deeds), but that the portly, proper Louisine Havemeyer was also an earnest suffragette and managed to get herself arrested at a Washington demonstration when she was in her sixties only adds to the charm of her story. Great fortunes may only be made in the dark, as Captain Shotover tells us, but there is no denying that some of the booty might well be put to good use in the light.

This year's Whitney Biennial had a kind of pleasing integrity, or clarity, to it that it hasn't had in a long time. By this I don't mean that the experience was a generally agreeable one (it wasn't)—though Ida Applebroog and Alison Saar are dependable, interesting artists and always worth seeing—but that the terms of the show and the Whitney's whole slant on contemporary American art were put forth with

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a thoroughness and candor that previous Biennials have not approached. Meaning: "straight" oil on canvas was reduced to an absolute bare minimum (perfect integrity or clarity would have necessitated omitting altogether the few amateur examples of the medium that were pointlessly included—Sue Williams, Karen Kilimnik, etc.) while conceptual, mixed-media, video, and installation art of a heavily political nature was proclaimed the heart and soul of the whole business. (I did like Glenn Ligon's elaborate tableaux about the objectification of the black male body, which stood out as a less muddled or slapdash work than much of what surrounded it.) No serious equivocating to worry about, though; there it is, art as earnest political expression, *period*, end of story. At least you know what you're getting for your $7.50. For those quaint souls who are still interested in what the Whitney regards as outmoded, the last several months did offer plenty of satisfying exhibitions: the authoritative abstractions of Sean Scully at Mary Boone and Catherine Lee at Galerie Lelong, the more austere abstractions of Harvey Quaytman at David McKee, Philip Pearlstein's nudes and cityscapes at Hirschl & Adler Modern, the ebullient mannerism of Jennifer Bartlett at Paula Cooper, the funky Ed Paschke at Phyllis Kind, and the eerie faux landscapes of April Gornik at Ed Thorp. Scully, the best of the lot, has never been included in any Whitney Biennial.

A particularly fine example of the art of serious, intelligent painting in our time was the Susan Rothenberg retrospective that originated at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo last fall and was shown at the Hirshhorn in Washington, D.C. this spring before traveling to St. Louis, Chicago, and Seattle, where it closes in early 1994. Rothenberg made a splash in the 1970s with her expressionistic "horse paintings," done at a time when skepticism about oil painting was at its height and, paradoxically, the thirst for confident, tactile, non-Conceptualist work was most intense. She has since solidified her eminent position as one of those artists involved in "recharging the figurative presence in American art," as curator Michael Auping writes. But she is hardly to be looked upon as a rearguard type, oblivious to history and the accomplishments of the line that runs from Malevich and Mondrian to Rothko and Scully. For, "[if] this century began with the fragmentation of the figure," Auping notes, "it is ending with an impulse to reinvent it."[1] That impulse is one that has little to do with realism or representation, and everything to do with a desire to reinvest painting with meaning and aura, to acknowledge physicality as equivalent to rather than antithetical to intellect (Marcel Duchamp to the contrary), to find common ground between painterly abstraction and the visible *things* of the world.

The recent exhibition, much like her last shows at the Sperone Westwater Gallery in SoHo, suggests that Rothenberg is at the peak of

[1] SUSAN ROTHENBERG: Paintings and Drawings, by *Michael Auping*. Rizzoli. $20.00.

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her talent and might be the one New Image painter to last. The seventy-one key examples, both drawings and paintings, of eighteen years of work which Auping selected manage to avoid staleness and cliché even when the artist is pursuing the same theme over the years. For whether Rothenberg is working with the full figure or the moving or stationary horse, as in the 1970s pictures, or with the mask-like heads, torsos, hands, bones, or goats of the late eighties paintings, she is concerned with a related issue: the power of the vestigial or fragmented image to convey a psychological and visual charge in an era that doesn't quite believe that can be done anymore. Somewhat like the cleric at the end of Bergman's *Winter Light*, who decides to go on praying in the face of his own unbelief, any starkly figurative painter (excepting the figurative painter with a satirical or political agenda) today sets himself or herself against the spirit of the times. In this sense, Rothenberg is not unique; others are doing the kind of work she is. What matters, as with all art in the final analysis, is the technique, vivacity, and confidence involved, the mastery of exacting formal values. This is where Rothenberg shines above her peers. In her earlier works, she used acrylic and tempera on her canvases, then experimented with acrylic and flashe on canvas, and by the mid-1980s was working in oil on canvas. The constant for her has been an ability to create a thick, intoxicating backdrop of overlapping color, often blues, grays, and whites, that makes the image she is letting strain through the color field appear all the more energetic and yet uncertain. Hers are ghostly torsos, heads, and horses, more intuitive than symbolic. They are painted in the agitated style of an urgent dream. Emerging from a space that is both dense and light, they *will* themselves into life. In the most recent paintings, the field around and behind the images is a zone of fiercely jabbed, potentially conflicting colors and brushstrokes, less sensual and more high-keyed than in the early paintings, as if the whole gamble were being anted up a notch. In a period in which so much art—some of it worthwhile, a lot of it not—is preoccupied with sociological ends, the presence of a Susan Rothenberg in our midst is both satisfying and salutary.

Also of interest (and of relevance to this matter of the different branches of development an art form might take) was the summer exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut which came with the prolix title "Motion and Document, Sequence and Time: Eadweard Muybridge and Contemporary American Photography." Part scientist, part artist, both a visionary and an entrepreneur, Muybridge was to photography in late nineteenth-century America what Thomas Eakins was to painting, and it is not coincidental that the two men were professional associates. His tome *Animal Locomotion*, published in 1887, contains almost 20,000 images of his subjects in various sequential stages of movement. A painstaking craftsman, Muybridge was as obsessed with the anatomy of movement and

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time as Eakins was with bone and sinew, muscle and flesh. He has been the focus of several important exhibitions over the last two decades. What makes the current traveling show a different event, though, is its thesis that Muybridge should be seen not as the isolated genius—like Eakins—we usually consider him to be, but as the progenitor of an ongoing tradition of photography that forsakes color, narrative, psychology, and obvious drama for a more philosophical study of time, motion, and the nature of documentation. We might value him, this show says, as the initiator of a mode of photography that is conceptual as much as aesthetic, that provokes thought about visual perception itself and the ahistorical, undramatic passage of time.

The premise is convincing, even as the curators have dared to be varied and wide-ranging in the selections they have gathered around Muybridge's own pictures and moving studies. Robert Frank's *London Hearse* photographs (1951) show us from different angles a coffin being loaded onto a hearse on a foggy, largely deserted London street, but they seem to be about the natural deadness of the moment—time stopped—as much as anything more emotional or elegiac. Walker Evans' time-capsule New York subway portraits from the 1930s were included, as were Ralph Steiner's *Laundry Series* (c. 1967), which deals simply and effectively with sheets blowing and flapping in the wind, and Robert Mapplethorpe's un-pornographic pictures of Thomas, his black model fully circumscribed in every image by a dark circle. Sarah Charlesworth's wall of photographs was comprised of pictures taken of the front pages of a great many newspapers from February 26, 1979, all of which included their own photo of the total eclipse of the sun as it appeared in their region at that same moment. Charlesworth has eliminated everything from each front page—all the newsprint, the other photos—except that particular view of the darkening sun and the paper's name and logo. Duane Michaels is even more inventive in *Things Are Queer*, a series of photographs that suggests that each picture preceding it is merely a tiny part of, or a small picture within, the photo that follows. And William Wegman hilariously spoofs the whole Muybridge mania for relentlessly photographing people and animals running and jumping with his 1988 *Untitled (Fay Running, After Muybridge)*, four pictures of his beloved dog flopped on her side with her legs in different stages of pretended brisk motion. In truth, this exhibition runs the risk, in the retelling, of sounding contrived or sterile. Far from it. It was one of the first photography shows I have seen in a while that had something new to say about the medium and its history.

It might also be happily noted that the Wadsworth had on view this summer a Susan Rothenberg painting on loan from the Eli and Edythe Broad Collection. *Juggler with Shadows* (1987) was vintage Rothenberg: a fascinating skein of expertly manipulated brushstrokes, a kinetic figure asserting itself in a seductive void, a testament to an art form alive and kicking—or, if you wish, juggling and enduring.

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BERT CARDULLO

Forbidden Games

FROM THE BEGINNING, FILM DEVELOPED in two distinctive directions: the realistic and the fantastic. The Lumière brothers, in such shorts as *The Arrival of a Train* (1895) and *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895), represented the will to reproduce physical reality on screen, while Georges Méliès, with such titles as *The Man with the India-Rubber Head* (1901) and *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), typified the urge to create a world of purely imaginary people, things, and events. Of course, the realistic and the fantastic frequently merge: realism is, after all, not reality itself but rather a style or convention that requires as much imagination in the end as any other; and even the directors of fantasy films often take their subject matter from the photographable world, the surface of concrete reality, which each then transmutes according to his particular vision. Nonetheless, the terms "realistic" and "fantastic" can be helpful when used to suggest a tendency toward either polarity, as in the case of the recent films *Stolen Children* and *Léolo.*

In subject and style, *Stolen Children* resembles the films of Italian neorealism, which employed contemporary stories, focused on recognizable characters taken from daily life, and treated pressing problems—resistance during the war to Nazis and Fascists alike, after the war to unemployment, poverty, and social injustice. (Indeed, the Italian title, *Il ladro di bambini*—literally, *The Thief of Children*—seems designed to recall that masterpiece of neorealism, *Ladri di biciclette* [*The Bicycle Thief*, 1948].) Perhaps most important, neorealist films replaced the traditional cinematic emphasis on the psychological complexities of the exceptional individual with a desire to investigate ordinary human beings in their social, economic, and political context. The essential theme of the neorealist film, then, was the conflict between the common man and the immense societal forces that were completely external to him yet completely determined his existence. The most pitiful victims of such forces, because the most innocent, are children, and thus it is no accident that important neorealist films featured them: *The Children Are Watching Us* (1943), *Shoeshine* (1946), and *Germany, Year Zero* (1947), for example. It is also no accident that neorealist directors frequently used nonprofessional actors—children prominent among them—in order to give their films an authenticity and a spontaneity not associated with the performances of stars.

Authenticity and spontaneity, not preciosity and calculation, are what Valentina Scalici and Giuseppe Ieracitano, nonprofessionals

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both, bring to the roles of Rosetta and Luciano in *Stolen Children*, Gianni Amelio's second film to be shown in this country. His first, *Open Doors* (1990), was based on the novella by Leonardo Sciascia; *Stolen Children*, by contrast, was suggested by a newspaper story about an eleven-year-old girl whose mother had prostituted her (for two years!) in order to support their impoverished family. Had this film been made in America, it would have focused on the lurid details of Rosetta's prostitution. Amelio, who co-wrote the script as well as directed, focuses instead on the aftermath of the mother's arrest and the turning over to Milanese authorities of the girl together with her nine-year-old brother, Luciano. They live in Milan but are Sicilian, which is to say that they are the equivalent of poor blacks—especially those who have migrated from the South—in any major American city.

Stolen Children begins with the apprehension of the mother and Rosetta's male pimp by police, but Amelio immediately announces his intentions by placing emphasis far less on the suspenseful confrontation between cops and criminals than on the effect of his sister's prostitution on the boy, who is isolated in medium close-up in the film's first shot, and with whom the camera remains as the pathetic (not demonized) adults are taken away. The asthmatic, taciturn Luciano and the sullen, suspicious Rosetta are ordered to a Catholic children's home in Civitavecchia, outside Rome, where they are to be escorted, not by social workers (who have turned down the job), but by two carabinieri. En route by train, the older of the two officers takes off to see his girlfriend in Bologna, which is its own comment on civil responsibility. He leaves the two children in the hands of his colleague, the gentle but awkward Antonio, who changes into civilian clothes in order to put a human face on his endeavor.

What follows, however, is not a sentimental tale of bonding between two children and a substitute for the father who long ago abandoned them. A kind of bonding does occur in *Stolen Children*, especially between Antonio and Luciano, but it is not one that leads to the children's redemption; in fact, one could argue that their orphans' lot will be made more painful by the relatively happy, untroubled time they spend with the caring carabiniere. Amelio's aim in this film is not to fulfill our wishful thinking about neglected or abused children and those who are given the task of watching over them, but rather to take a hard, veristic look at imperiled young lives caught up in a social system, and by extension a physical world, that seems indifferent, insensate, inhumane.

The home at Civitavecchia refuses to accept Rosetta and Luciano on the grounds that they have no medical certificates and are Sicilian, which ostensibly would make their fitting in with the other children difficult. But what we sense is that the priests and nuns of this orphanage want nothing to do with an eleven-year-old ex-prostitute and her uncommunicative, nearly anorexic brother. So Antonio has to take them to a second children's home in distant Sicily, which

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means that along the way he can stop at his sister's new restaurant in Calabria. It is here that he grew up and here that he again experiences the warmth of familial relations—with his sister, with his loving grandmother—from which his job has separated him, and which will forever be denied Rosetta and Luciano. Nonetheless, Antonio and the children begin acting like their own little family at the restaurant, where one of his young relatives is celebrating her first Communion. Indeed, Rosetta and Luciano are treated as family, and behave like real children for perhaps the first time, until one of the celebrants recognizes the girl from a picture in a tabloid that reported her mother's imprisonment. Rosetta runs away from the restaurant in distress, to be consoled by Antonio along the side of the road with traffic whizzing noisily by, traffic that recurs like a numbing leitmotif throughout *Stolen Children.*

This location—a restaurant right beside a busy road, in a once-scenic coastal area that is now dotted with colorless, sometimes unfinished cinderblock buildings—is representative of most of the settings in the film in its coldness, impersonality, even harshness. The carabiniere and his charges, both of whom require the most private attention, must pass their journey in the most public and dispiriting of places: ugly new railroad terminals, characterless police stations, garish fast-food joints, seedy motel rooms or dingy public housing, people's parks that should be oases in the midst of bleak urban landscapes but instead have become havens for derelicts, criminals, and deviants. It is against these sad backdrops, usually photographed by Tonino Nardi and Renato Tafuri so as to drain the life from or cast a bluish pall over what little color they have, that the narrative of *Stolen Children* unfolds. And one cannot help but draw the conclusion that such vacant public spheres—which surely extend far beyond the catalogue contained in this small-scale film—have had a pernicious influence on those who inhabit them, private citizens and public officials alike. In his compassion and concern Antonio is the exception, as are selected members of his family, but how long can he remain one under these conditions, and at what price?

Amelio poignantly saves the carabiniere's best moments with the children for last. With more freedom now that they've rented a car, the three stop at a beach in Sicily, where Antonio teaches Luciano to swim, Rosetta plays in the sand, and they eat a relaxed meal at an outdoor restaurant. The fun continues with some sightseeing in Noto, until a thief snatches the purse of a French tourist who has befriended Rosetta. Antonio catches the man and takes him to the local carabinieri headquarters, only to be strongly reprimanded—even suspected of kidnapping and child molestation—for dawdling with his charges during the journey from Civitavecchia to Sicily. The three then proceed by night to the children's home, pulling off to the side of the road for some rest but sleeping until morning. Antonio remains sleeping at the wheel as the sun comes up, but Luciano and Rosetta

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awaken and go sit by the side of the highway, their backs to the camera, watching traffic zoom by. The girl puts a jacket around her brother's shoulders—not the first time she has exhibited solicitude toward him—and the two of them continue sitting and staring out, in a long take of a long shot, as the film ends. All they have is each other, Antonio has sincerely told them and the camera now tells us; the carabiniere, for all his good intentions, is asleep at the wheel, and soon will depart from these children's lives forever despite his promise to visit them. They know they'll never see him again, and they also know that life at the "home" won't be considerably better than the life they've led up to now, which is one reason Amelio doesn't bother to show their arrival there. In a sense, these two will forever be transient, hence quietly embittered, obdurately remote, and insufferably forlorn.

Notwithstanding several unions in two-shot during the film, Rosetta and Luciano have more often been separated in his or her own frame in order to indicate each one's essential isolation. And the soundtrack, cued by the terse screenplay, has been careful to stress the long silences that these children observe by selectively eliminating Franco Piersanti's melancholy if not mournful score for bongos and flute. Antonio himself ceases to talk from the time the threesome leaves Noto, finally silenced, like the judge in *Open Doors*, by a system that leaves little room for query, detour, or genuine society. Like the two naval petty officers in *The Last Detail* (1973), assigned to escort a young recruit convicted of petty thievery from his base in Virginia to prison in New Hampshire, Antonio has struggled to break down his charges' defenses, to win their confidence and show them something resembling a good time, and in return for his efforts he's left feeling as empty, as helpless, as small as they are. Enrico Lo Verso's acting of the part gradually reveals the openhearted, loving child that has been father to the man—a child whose photograph, given to Luciano by Antonio's grandmother, is viewed with a mixture of envy and wonder by Rosetta and her brother.

Like Luciano and Rosetta, Léo Lozeau finds himself trapped in a dysfunctional family; unlike these two, however, he is permitted to escape from the sordid reality of a Montreal slum into his imagination. The two Sicilian children's imagination itself seems to be impoverished, but in a sense so is Léo's, since it is filled mostly with bizarre images and incidents from the very family life he seeks to escape. If that bizarreness is the expressionistic embellishment of his febrile imagination, then Léo is all the more trapped by his environment, which has caused his mind, not to create an alternative world to the one in which he lives, but to exaggerate the already bad features of the people and things that surround him. He becomes, in effect, a prisoner of his own hyperactive consciousness, which eventually short-circuits. "Because I dream, I am not," intones the mature Léo periodically in voice-over, in his role as narrator of his younger self's fantasy life, and his meaning is double-edged. Because he dreams, he

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believes he can escape being a poor Québecois and the crazed product of a family that is itself crazed; because he dreams, he is *not* these things. But because Léo dreams, he paradoxically *becomes* these things, in nightmarish fashion, and they ultimately destroy him. Léo may grow into the man who narrates the tale of his youth, but the point is that this man has not grown beyond a replaying of his boyish chimeras. Because he too dreams, he does not live.

Léo Lozeau is the autobiographical protagonist of Jean-Claude Lauzon's second film, *Léolo*, which, unlike his first, *Night Zoo* (1987), does not make the mistake of trying to be two movies at the same time: in the case of the earlier work, a slick urban thriller and an eccentric family portrait. The French-Canadian Léo begins the film by fantasizing a new life for himself as the Sicilian Léolo Lozone, the product of an accidental squat by his rotund mother on a tomato in an East Montreal market—a tomato that had mischievously been filled with sperm by an anonymous Italian farmworker before being shipped. But even though Léo insists throughout on being called Léolo, and three or four times gambols through a touristic Sicilian countryside calling out for "Bianca my love, my Italy" (although she has motioned to him from beyond a blaze of light, which serves as a kind of doorway to edenic Sicily, Bianca is in reality a Sicilian-Canadian girl who lives in Léo's tenement and is the object of his grandfather's pedophilic lust), he does not succeed in reinventing his life as a Sicilian. He remains Léo Lozeau, a Québecois doomed to write only of his experiences with his father, mother, brother, two sisters, and grandfather.

"My family had become characters in a fiction, and I spoke of them as if they were strangers," declares the narrator as the young Léo scribbles at his desk—an image to which the film regularly returns—and Lauzon translates his words into moving pictures. The narrator gives himself too much credit, however, for his younger self never gains the distance from his familial encounters that would enable him to transmute them into art. Feverish, structurally fluid memoir, yes, but not the art that would empower him to transcend his experience even as he depicts it, to save himself, as it were, even as he injects himself with seemingly deadly virus. Léo *doesn't* transcend his experience: that's his problem, and what leads to his undoing. Indeed, if anything he is swamped by it, as is made clear by two shots of the boy deep beneath the St. Lawrence River, searching for baubles amidst the garbage on the floor of what has become an underwater dumpsite, and another of him in a scuba mask looking down on his grandfather's Bianca-assisted bath cum foot massage. Perhaps this is Lauzon's point—that his alter ego is so suffocated by his life as a Lozeau that he can't rise above it—but the director-screenwriter runs the risk in making that point of merely giving a prolonged descriptive account of mutant domesticity, of the family as freak show. The fact that it's his own family in this heightened version doesn't matter, nor does his weaving of the Word Tamer into and out of the action.

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Based on André Petrowski, a former member of the National Film Board of Canada who encouraged Lauzon to write for the screen (and to whom *Léolo* is dedicated), the white-haired Word Tamer is both a figure of Léo's imagination and the symbol or angel of art. He collects loose pages from the boy's memoir (pages that Léo himself routinely consigns to the trash), reads them in his book-lined, sculpture-filled lair, and exhorts the aspiring artist to go on dreaming. The wise old man exists, then, not only as a kind of narrative quadrupling device—Léo writes, the narrator speaks, Lauzon films, the Word Tamer reads—but also as an emblematic alternative to Léo's family. Yet he fails in both roles: since he does not read aloud, he doesn't actually have a narrative voice, and as a symbol he is ponderous and ineffectual. The Word Tamer is himself tamed by the end of the film. Léo's repeated attempts to create an artistic alternative to his squalid, narrow existence have driven him into a coma, and shots of him floating comatose in a pool of ice are intercut at the end with shots of his mentor consigning the boy's manuscript to a dusty shelf, then roaming aimlessly through his candlelit shrine to the arts.

What kind of family would impel a boy to create in his mind a beckoning Sicilian homeland unknown to the waifs in *Stolen Children*? One characterized by gluttony, ugliness, poverty, perversion, and stupidity. One in which scavenging as well as sweatshop labor is required to pay the bills; in which nobody save Léo reads anything but billboards and sees anything except television; in which almost everyone seems obsessed with his or her bowel movements; where the older brother, Fernand, works out with weights to such an extreme that he literally turns into a different person, yet figuratively remains the same weakling he always was; where Léo relieves his intellectual frustration through excessive, and sometimes highly ingenious, masturbation, through glue-sniffing in addition to beer-drinking, and through the attempted murder of his grandfather (who has previously tried to drown him); where everyone except Léo—but especially his sisters Rita and Nanette—is routinely admitted to and discharged from the local mental hospital; and where rats, flies, poultry, and small reptiles seem completely at home among the human beings. Yet Léo has deep affection for everyone in this menagerie except his grandfather and possibly his father, has the kind of unconditional love for his family that comes, of course, from never having known any other. And it is this division in the boy between love for those who have loved him, no matter how strange the manner of expression, and rejection of everything demeaning and demented in his heritage, that causes him in effect to lose his mind. Léo cannot escape the Lozeaus in his imagination, and he cannot live with them in real life, so his only recourse is to become a vegetable. His ambivalence is captured in the paradox of his final written words, mouthed by the narrator: "Because I was afraid to love, I no longer dream."

Canadians, I've read in more than one place, regard Léo's Sicilian

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reverie as a metaphor for Quebec's nationalist ambitions. Piers Handling, director of programming for the Toronto Film Festival, believes that *Léolo* is

> a kind of epitaph for Quebec, which has a long tradition of trying to change reality, of refusing to be a colony. It's a film of despair, of closed doors, of the impossibility of any hope of change. Léolo the boy . . . [and] Quebec [are] both trying to dream themselves into another world, but completely failing.[1]

Well, *Léolo* may be a political metaphor, but it's also, in the words of André Petrowski himself, "a poem to egocentrism,"[2] and if the film finally fails, that is because its egocentrism gets the better of it. Lauzon crosses van Dormael's *Toto the Hero* (1991) with Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), stealing a repugnantly amusing episode or two from the movie of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1972) along the way, and the result is more a species of self-congratulatory bathroom farce than an evocative portrait of the cinematic artist as young man. *Léolo*'s egocentrism has removed it from the world, and the danger in that is always that one's self-regard may be shared by no one but oneself.

So self-exalting is the film that it is not content to fill its soundtrack with such thematically appropriate, if chi-chi songs as Tom Waits's "Cold Cold Ground" and the Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want," but must also include liturgical music in the form of Tibetan chants, an "alleluia" chorus, Ethiopian tribal anthems, and Québecois-Catholic folk tunes! At least Guy Dufaux's cinematography doesn't commit the same sin in visual terms: there are very few shots that are surrealistically stunning for their own sake, and there easily could have been in this film. If anything, Dufaux goes too far in the other direction, understating or diluting *Léolo*'s color to such a degree that sometimes we think we're watching just another dank, dreary kitchen drama. For its part, the acting is good enough but necessarily limited by the film's design to being one-dimensional: there are the loving, smothering mother (Ginette Reno), the lubricious, testy grandfather (Julien Guiomar), the august, avuncular sage (Pierre Bourgault), etc. The one exception is the role of Léo, and twelve-year-old Maxime Collin is acceptable but not memorable. He's far too impassive in the part, taking the character too literally when he writes, "I am a spectator of my own life." I've forgotten Collin's face and manner already, though I shan't soon forget those of Valentina Scalici and Giuseppe Ieracitano.

[1] Handling quoted by Peter Brunette, "With *Léolo*, It Is Better to Feel Than to Understand," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1993, Sec. H, p. 22, col. 2.

[2] Petrowski quoted by Brunette, p. 22, col. 5.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

The People Spoke

AMERICAN DANCE INSTITUTIONS LEAD NOTORIOUSLY SHORT LIVES. The dance didn't really get started here until the second decade of this century, and its sustenance has come from dedicated, underpaid individuals obsessed with the notion that dancing offered something to the soul no other human activity could provide. This isn't exactly the most marketable project, and dance schools and companies seem to wilt when their idealistic founders move on to other things. So the survival of the New Dance Group from 1932 to today is an extraordinary achievement. The Group antedates the School of American Ballet (founded in 1934) and the American Dance Festival (a continuation of the Bennington School of Dance, 1934), and virtually every modern dance and ballet company still in existence. To celebrate this prodigious longevity, last June the American Dance Guild presented an extraordinary concert of works by choreographers associated with the Group over the years. Given in conjunction with the joint conference of the Congress of Research in Dance and the Society of Dance History Scholars, the event touched off a series of provocative reminiscences. Regrettably, none of the collaborating organizations took the opportunity to commission any in-depth writing on the subject, though a handsome memorial brochure was produced.

One reason for the New Dance Group's long life was that it never became the domain of a single artist. A collective in both its teaching and producing activities, the Group founded its identity on the idea of dance as "a viable weapon for the struggles of the working class," rather than the individual voice of any member. These modern dancers thought they were dancing about real people and real people's lives. They taught classes at low prices and choreographed political messages to rouse the masses. We can hardly imagine today the assemblages, big and small, that fired up the populace in the thirties. Dancers, singers, actors, speechmakers wanted their audiences to be galvanized into action, to demand tolerance, fair wages, and an end to war. Even the political marches of the sixties didn't have the idealistic fervor of those times.

It was communism's proletarian vision that seized artists in the thirties. Politically naive but socially concerned, they espoused the Soviet experiment, which seemed to them the only hope for righting the injustices of the world, and particularly the injustices of capitalism. Whatever we now recognize as communism's failures, its early

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manifestation held out hope that the humanist's dream of equality, freedom, and an end to poverty could actually be realized. This is the challenge the early New Dance Group choreographers flung at their audiences, in the form of dances that would wake people up, reflect the trials and joys of their lives, and allow them to hope for a better life to come.

Dancers hardly ever think of themselves as political animals. Even today, when you can scarcely set foot in a dance performance without witnessing radical criticism of mainstream values, transgression seems less a risk than a trend, and the images of Lesbian Nation or an AIDS-free world are as fictitious as Shangri-la. How credulous the thirties seem to us now—the murals of stalwart laborers marching shoulder to shoulder into a glorious future, the great choral hymns to the American spirit, the pamphlets and the cell meetings and the earnest editorials. This was idealism soaked in belief. The earliest classes at the New Dance Group, according to founding member Jane Dudley, consisted of three hours, equally divided between technique, improvisation on a specific social theme, and Marxist theory. The theory may have been pretty basic, said Dudley at one of several CORD/SDHS conference sessions devoted to the New Dance Group's history, but the main concern was how to make dances that would effectively propagandize for the cause.

The flavor of those times was reconstituted by Edna Ocko, a rosy octogenarian none the worse for a many-layered career that included being chief apologist for the left-wing dancers. Interviewed at the CORD/SDHS conference by critic-historian Lynn Garafola, Ocko gave a lively account of the scene. Ocko is a shadowy fixture of the thirties dance world. I'd seen her writing, usually in the form of crumbling newsprint from long-defunct publications, while researching some dancer or other. I'd noticed her slip in and out of the Federal Dance Project and other progressive experiments. What struck me on encountering her in the flesh for the first time was her matter-of-factness about things the dance world prefers not to recall. Who today acknowledges the New Masses, for instance, as a champion of modern dance?

In those formative days, one of the modern dance's natural allies was the left-wing press. The most staid and settled of dance's vanguard—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm—were considered far outside the mainstream of the arts. Though espoused by *New York Times* critic John Martin, they were nonetheless the enemies of classical dancing and other traditional modes of expression. Often, as in the case of those independents who gravitated to the New Dance Group, they were also avowed political activists. Ocko, in love with modern dance and determined to promote its aesthetic, became a critic because, she says, she danced and she could spell. Using a variety of pseudonyms and styles, she often wrote reviews of

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the same concert for different papers, figuring there was always more to say about something than she could fit in one short piece.

Ocko's account of the radical dances confirmed what you can see in archival photographs, but what is never spoken. "We weren't very aesthetic. We looked down on agitprop dancing, it wasn't really dancing, and we wanted to be more artistic than that. The workers liked ballet—they had good taste. We liked ballet too, but we thought we should look dilapidated and ragged. We put things together with safety pins." The best of the kind of thing Ocko meant was a dance like Jane Dudley's *Harmonica Breakdown* (1934), to music of Sonny Terry. Performed at the retrospective concert by an electrifying Sheron Wray, the dance is spare and gritty, unsentimental but full of the feelings of discouragement, determination, and irrepressible though groundless laughter. "I think of it as a dance of misery—and defiance rising out of it," Dudley said at the conference. "There was a drive to life and the misery and difficulty of life." The same sense of life scraped down to the bone was felt in Eve Gentry's *Tenant of the Street* (1938), danced by Mary Anne Newell. To the noise of automobile traffic, a bent figure lurches across the space, arthritic fists seeming to pry open a pathway. The figure hugs the ground, sometimes scrabbling on the floor or huddled in fear, but she's never defeated, and trudges on as the dance ends.

Character studies of the poor and oppressed weren't the only political dances these choreographers made. There were many direct statements about events in the headlines—strikes, political trials, the Spanish Civil War. The most important of these thematic works given on the concert was Charles Weidman's still-powerful *Lynchtown*, which wasn't actually a New Dance Group original. Weidman made it in 1936 for the company he directed with Doris Humphrey. More overtly radical than his partner, and less preoccupied with a singular choreographic vision, Weidman moved around more in the dance world, choreographing enthusiastically for operas, Broadway shows, political rallies, the WPA, and independent concerts with non-Humphrey-Weidman dancers. Made long before Weidman taught for the New Dance Group in the sixties, *Lynchtown* was a strong addition to the program as performed by his last direct heirs, the Deborah Carr Theatre Dance Ensemble.

Lynchtown is a dance about mob violence. Typical of modern dance's determination to avoid literalism, it isn't a picture of wild rioting or rabble-rousing; there's no physical blow struck. Instead the energy of the blood-lusting mob is abstracted and contained in careful group patterns that build and travel inexorably toward a place offstage where the murder will take place. The pursuers strain forward, leap on each other's backs like jockeys, weave through the crowd. They mass together, lashed to fury by one woman. This mob has a strange intensity. The members don't seem to speak to each other, but they communicate their hatred body-to-body, like a herd of animals.

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Of dozens of impassioned dances *Lynchtown* is virtually the only one to survive the thirties. No one remembers, for instance, the New Dance Group's famed *Van der Lubbe's Head*, an award-winning, collectively choreographed response to the Reichstag fire that engineered Hilter's rise to power. Martha Graham's protests against the war in Spain, *Immediate Tragedy* and *Deep Song*, are lost, though Graham in her final years re-activated *Deep Song* from photographs. And many more works, perhaps less memorable but equally timely, simply disappeared. Often they were outright ephemera, made for election rallies or benefits, and only performed once. I suspect too that during the forties and fifties, when they could have been brought into the repertory of newly-formed dance companies, they would have been an embarrassing reminder of political indiscretion.

By the end of the thirties, communist and socialist sympathies had become the brand of a traitor. Artists who'd been altruistic enough to join the party or work for social reform were hounded by zealous legislators and denounced in the press. Edna Ocko admitted her gradual withdrawal from dance writing was partly due to the threat of this kind of persecution. In the early fifties she was named as a party follower by Jerome Robbins, whose disclosure of information to a congressional committee was one of the public humiliations artists had to undergo in order to avoid even worse ones. Henry Cowell, for instance, wrote several scores for modern dancers while sitting out a California jail sentence. Dance, like the other arts of protest, pulled in its horns, as the campaigns of intimidation meant it to do. Modern dance had always had both a political and an artistic agenda, and essentially it was the artistic side that continued to develop during the silent years until the next revolution, in the sixties. Things became more dramatic, more concentrated on individual experience and eccentric character, more celebratory and patriotic, and in some cases more esoteric.

Nearly all the post-thirties dances on the New Dance Group retrospective illustrated one of these themes: Jean Erdman's *The Transformations of Medusa* (1942), a portrait of an archaic but gorgeous post-Graham figure; Valerie Bettis' tormented solo-with-narrative *The Desperate Heart* (1943); Anna Sokolow's portrait of lovers trying to make contact, the duet from *Lyric Suite* (1954); Joseph Gifford's 1947 duet *The Flight*, with its Spanish street-band music suddenly diminishing to a funereal drumbeat; and Daniel Nagrin's 1948 *Strenge Hero*, straight out of detective novels and noir films. The modern dance was growing tame. No longer a searing adventure into the emotional depths, it was evening out into movements of lyrical and even virtuosic splendor.

The other great strength of the New Dance Group, and it went completely unremarked in any of the written or oral commentary around the concert, was its embracing of ethnicity. Nowhere in the history of dance can we find such a thoroughly integrated union of

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talents. Integration, assimilation, these were the watchwords of the liberal thirties. Take every person for the talents he or she can offer; respect everyone's roots and welcome the contribution each one can make to the American dream. Not only were black choreographers and teachers part of the New Dance Group (represented on the concert by Donald McKayle, Pearl Primus, Talley Beatty and Ronne Aul), but there were proponents of European folk dance, Hindu, Hawaiian, Spanish, and just about every other style known. Ethnicity is not so simple today; it evokes partisanship, even territoriality. I'm not saying I'd like to go back to the thirties, but I wish we hadn't so thoroughly lost the faith in goals that everyone could share, in dancing that could bring us together. For perhaps the only time in our history, the new dancers had the idea that they were part of the people, and that, in the heartening words of Woody Guthrie that accompanied Sophie Maslow's 1942 *Folksay*, "The people will stick around a long time."

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music and the Marketplace

IF YOU ARE, LIKE ME, of a certain age, it is probable that you carry with you the conscious or unconscious assumption that art has something to fear from the marketplace. You can't sell Botticelli, Brancusi and Beethoven like soap, the saying goes—nor, to be sure, like Godiva chocolates or vitamin supplements, touting their capacity to yield pleasure or their restorative virtues. And if you try, the inevitable consequence is that the fraudulence of the merchandising will leach into the art itself and finally corrupt it.

So we are accustomed to view with suspicion any attempt at getting people into our theatres, galleries and concert halls that is not grounded in chaste statements of what is to be experienced there. It cannot have escaped any alert observer's notice, therefore, that these closing decades of the century are offering more and more to arouse such suspicion. As the generations that can remember the Second World War see their numbers dwindle, and are being replaced on the staffs of our chief artistic programming institutions, cultural mores are being transformed. No longer can these institutions count on the traditional social forces that created audiences for theatre, concert music and the plastic arts to send the young eagerly through their doors and onto their mailing lists. Audiences in particular for opera, the symphony orchestra and the chamber ensemble have become harder to replenish as costs have risen and our large urban centers, where such organizations once thrived, become less hospitable to artistic connoisseurship in almost every way.

A new strain of arts administrator is grappling with these conditions, and in concert life one method of dealing with them seems to be taking root: combining music with cultural pedagogy. More and more, individual programs, groups of special events and even whole seasons are festooned with lectures, slide shows, panel discussions, cinema screenings and the like, intended to attract the uninitiated and enable him to understand better what he hears, therefore presumably to enjoy it more.

The idea is not new at all: one has only to think of Leonard Bernstein to recall the honorable place in our concert halls of at least one manifestation of such pedagogical effort. Another, the wrapping of a musical program around a thematic kernel—whether a cultural moment such as Napoleonic Paris or Weimar Germany, a personal connection such as the sons of Bach or the pupils of Liszt, an idea

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imported from another genre such as Viennese *Jugendstil* or *Biedermeier* Berlin, or even a total abstraction ("Unjust Obscurity?")—has also been with us for a long time, as practiced by such creditable figures as Erich Leinsdorf and Lukas Foss. But it is currently cropping up everywhere.

The most visible present exponent of the cross-fertilizing approach to concert programming is probably Leon Botstein, the indefatigable president of Bard College and since last year the music director of the American Symphony Orchestra, who single-handed seems to have prompted the return of the word "polymath" to journalistic currency on the East Coast. His musical and intellectual credentials are sound: a violinist and past principal guest conductor of the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, he founded the Bard College Summer Festival four years ago, each season focusing on a single composer—Brahms, Mendelssohn, Strauss, Dvořák—and his cultural milieu and contemporaries. In addition to performances there are lectures and panel discussions; Princeton University Press publishes a companion volume of essays on the featured composer.

In the six-concert American Symphony season just past in Carnegie Hall, Botstein tried to revive the orchestra's flagging fortunes with a dose of such intellectual salts. Three of the six were tied to exhibits at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library and the Whitney Museum of American Art. I sampled the last of these, organized under the rubric "American Modernism Seen and Heard: The Abstract Tradition in Music and Painting 1930–1975," and comprising works by Steve Reich, Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, Roger Sessions, Ruth Crawford-Seeger, Morton Feldman and Aaron Copland. Before the concert Barbara Haskell, curator for the Whitney's concurrent exhibition called "The Geometric Tradition in 20th-Century American Art," spoke about geometrical abstraction, illustrating her points with slides from the show. Later, between the musical numbers, Botstein followed suit, attempting to fashion stylistic and methodological links between canvas and score.

Botstein's intentions were noble if familiar, and his observations cogent but only fitfully revealing. Summarizing in the broadsheet ("Dialogues and Extensions") that came with the standard Carnegie program, he wrote,

> Today the audience for contemporary music is a fraction of what exists for art and literature. . . . Furthermore, very few of the hallmarks of musical modernism have seeped into our cultural consciousness, whether in popular music, film music or advertising jingles. . . . As the century draws to a close, this contrast should not deter us from attempting to make the great achievements . . . of this century, particularly in America, better known and better liked by the concert audience. . . . By comparing these American composers with their counterparts in art, rather than with their predecessors in

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music, a new avenue of appreciation and affection can be opened up to a vital, powerful and too often overlooked American aesthetic legacy.

In other words, Botstein thinks there is still hope. Regrettably, then, at least on this occasion, his mid-concert remarks—descending at one point to unhelpfully likening the musical concept of line to a hatched black line inscribed on one of the paintings under study—did little to open such an avenue. More regrettably, too, though Botstein is an experienced conductor, his orchestra is an assemblage of freelancers who do not possess the distinct advantages of working as a cohesive professional team. The absence on this occasion of any special illumination of the knotty particulars of the complex scores of Cowell, Sessions, Riegger and Copland suggested that preparation and performance alike suffered from the fracturing of concentration that Botstein's multiple roles dictate. This impression was strengthened when the conductor, midway in the Riegger work and apparently at odds with his players, stopped, apologized and began again at the beginning.

It is unquestionable that Botstein's innovations have breathed a kind of life into an institution that has been struggling to find a spot in New York's crowded cultural calendar. The American Symphony has made the most of its new conductor's reputation and fresh ideas and promoted them hard to the membership of the art museums it cooperated with. Subscription sales were said to have increased more than ten percent last season. Yet attendance was poor the Sunday afternoon I went, and to the practiced eye the audience differed not at all from New York convention in age and social composition.

Surely no attempt to weave music into the fabric of a cultural synthesis matches in ambition the New York Philharmonic's 150th anniversary season of 1992–93. And that was just one aspect of a busy year that launched a many-pronged plan to "reshape and redefine what orchestras will look like for the next millennium," according to Deborah Borda, the Philharmonic's managing director since 1991. Musical programming was linked throughout to significant events in the orchestra's history. Beginning at the season's outset with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the first piece performed by the newly founded Philharmonic in 1842, the orchestra traversed a rich schedule of works it had given their world premieres (Gershwin's Concerto in F, Dvořák's "New World" Symphony, Kodály's *Hary Janos* Suite) or U.S. premieres (Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements, Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*). Sprinkled among these were anniversary commissions by Olivier Messiaen, David Diamond, Christopher Rouse, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Philip Ramey and Karel Husa, and two weeklong "celebrations" centered on scores by Leonard Bernstein and the English composer-conductor Oliver Knussen.

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It hardly needs to be said that all this was a fertile breeding ground for cultural pedagogy, which sprang up all over Lincoln Center and elsewhere in the form of exhibitions, walking tours, preconcert lectures, "forums" in which Kurt Masur, the orchestra's music director and chief conductor, and Ms. Borda subjected themselves to audience questions, and a series of symposiums on the theme "The Orchestra and the City" in which past and present administrators and musicians were joined by historians, composers and critics in exploring "the greater social and cultural influences affecting the experience of the Philharmonic during the last 150 years." No one but the most tireless culture hound could have absorbed it all with equal rapture, but what I saw and heard was fully worthy of the institution it honored. A roundtable on the role of the critic, for example, produced some unexpected insights, and a preconcert analysis of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* by the estimable Michael Steinberg was apt. The forums in particular appear to have stimulated public interest, drawing as many as 500 attendees to Avery Fisher Hall on a nonconcert night.

But that was not the whole of it. Obviously, much of what is described above was preaching to the already converted. But it is no secret that, before the arrival of Ms. Borda and Mr. Masur, the Philharmonic shared the troubles, in kind though not in degree, of such brethren as the American Symphony Orchestra. Though it calls its current subscriber count of 72 percent of house capacity "an upward trend," that still leaves a lot of seats to fill one ticketholder at a time, and will for the foreseeable future. Thus Ms. Borda's plan to "reshape and redefine."

What the anniversary season revealed of this plan was ingenious and creditable. Resisting the temptation to pander, the Philharmonic's management presupposes that the potential regular concertgoer—and ultimate subscriber—will identify himself by easy stages, enticed by shorter and less expensive programs that offer approachable musical fare in comfortable circumstances. "Rush Hour" concerts, scheduled at 6:45 P.M. and lasting an hour or so without intermission, were designed to lure homeward-bound young professionals; the musicians mingled with them afterward at a post-concert reception. Likewise, "Casual Saturdays" targeted young families: about the same in duration, performances started at 2:00 P.M. and relaxed dress was encouraged. Ticket prices for these ranged from 10 to 20 percent less than standard. An even better bargain, for those lucky enough to have Wednesday or Thursday mornings free, were the season's frequent open rehearsals, where a mere five dollars got the listener the seat of his choice and a lot of excellent musicmaking.

"Four or five years ago," Ms. Borda has been quoted as saying, "there was a move by many institutions to throw everything out and do massive multicultural concerts." Rejecting that course, she asserts simply that "we have to be what we are." That seems unarguable, an

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admirably clearsighted refusal to be swept along by factitious trend. But it is hardly a certain portent of success. Early signs are positive, however: many of the unconventional concerts and open rehearsals were sold out, and overall attendance, the Philharmonic says, was about 96 percent of capacity. The advance program for the current season showed that the new formats are to be continued.

Still, it takes a leap of faith to imagine that any of the past season's plentiful innovations, these and others like them, represent the future of the symphony orchestra in America, if indeed it has a future in a society increasingly distracted, burdened with demands on its time, and distrustful of elites. Even if such initiatives secure the attention of people who might not otherwise buy concert tickets, will they continue to do so when, inevitably, the necessary financial and intellectual resources behind them grow thin and the didactic tone palls? Ultimately, if an artistic institution is to survive—if art itself is to survive—the society must want and need it. In fact, this conviction is implicit in the Philharmonic's undertakings: it is betting that enough people will want its services if only they can be shown that they do.

But the disturbing fact is that the bulk of today's audience acquired its taste for concert music in the home, with perhaps an extra boost from private instruction and elementary school programs, in a time quite different from our own. In the past several decades these formative forces have diminished to the point of disappearance. Can a late exposure to music and its cultural context fill the void? It will be a long time before the evidence is in.

In the meantime, a respectable number of last season's satellite events can stand on their own as refreshing additions to the city's cultural life, whatever their eventual effect in audience building. And for that hardy band that can still be parted from its ticket money by quality alone, it should be noted that the Philharmonic, now in its third year under Masur's stewardship, is currently delivering consistent artistic excellence on occasion after occasion, whatever the day of the week or the time of the day.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Burke's Great Melody

> *Johnson:* "Never believe extraordinary characters which you hear of people. Depend upon it, Sir, they are exaggerated. You do not see one man shoot a great deal higher than another." I mentioned Mr. Burke. *Johnson:* Yes; Burke is an extraordinary man. His stream of mind is perpetual." . . . And once, when Johnson was ill, and unable to exert himself as much as usual without fatigue, Mr. Burke having been mentioned, he said "That fellow calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now, it would kill me."
>
> —James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*

THIS MOMENT IN BOSWELL is among the most heartening ones for those who like to see great spirits appreciating one another, and Burke got a chance to reciprocate when, during Johnson's last illness, Burke in the company of others visited him. When at one point Burke apologized for the possible oppressiveness of this visit, Johnson replied that it was not so and that he would have to have been in a wretched state indeed "'when your company would not be a delight to me.' Mr. Burke, in a tremulous voice, expressive of being very tenderly affected, replied, 'My dear Sir, you have always been too good to me.' Immediately afterwards he went away." At the end of Conor Cruise O'Brien's 700-page book on Mr. Burke, the reader is left marveling at the perpetual stream of mind to which he has been treated; and a reader like myself—one with no professional credentials in eighteenth-century English history and politics—finds all his powers drawn forth in the effort not to be overwhelmed by the superior ones of Burke. Insofar as one survives to tell the tale, it is a tribute to Mr. O'Brien's strong hand at the narrative helm.[1]

Subtitled "A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke," *The Great Melody* is exactly that, taking its main title from Yeats's oddly affecting poem, "The Seven Sages," in which are celebrated the spirits of Swift, Berkeley, Goldsmith and Burke—"four great minds that hated Whiggery," as one of the sages claims, even though another replies that "Burke was a Whig." To which a further sage defines "Whiggery" as "A levelling, rancorous, rational sort of

[1] THE GREAT MELODY: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke, by *Conor Cruise O'Brien.* University of Chicago Press. $34.95.

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mind," insisting that, in those terms, Burke "hated" it. But he is celebrated positively in two subsequent lines:

> American colonies, Ireland, France and India
> Harried, and Burke's great melody against it.

It was brilliant of O'Brien to steal the great melody theme and make it the organizing principle for his thematic consideration of Burke's thought and writings with respect to these four areas of concern. We are to understand the melody in two aspects: first is "a profound inner harmony" that characterizes Burke's writing in which the melody is always "against it"—the "it" being, in O'Brien's term, "abuse of power." Second, there are those sequences and passages within the larger action of rhetoric and argument in which Burke's utterance "attains a glowing eloquence, unique in English literature and in the annals of oratory." O'Brien is scrupulous about pointing at—indeed, inviting us to *listen to*—the specific places where, in his judgment, the melody is at its most glowing. So that to read this book actively is to try out passages from the "commented anthology" on one's own ears in order to see what they register: this is how the book calls forth our powers.

In "The Tower," Yeats refers proudly to "the people of Burke and of Grattan," but O'Brien points out that in fact they were two distinct peoples, living in an adversarial relation to each other: Grattan's people being Anglo-Irish and Protestant; Burke's being Irish Catholic gentry. The Penal Laws in eighteenth-century Ireland by which the domination of the Protestants was enforced made for "a tense, equivocal and secretive" relation between Burke's family and his country. His father, Richard Burke, did conform to the established church; but his mother was a Catholic, and although Burke at age twelve went to a Quaker boarding school (run by Richard Shackleton, his admirable teacher), he previously had attended a Catholic "hedge" school while living with his mother's family in Cork. O'Brien's conviction, which deeply informs the pages of this book, is that Burke's equivocal relation to his Catholic heritage—even as he prepared himself, as a Protestant, for an English career—would inform his whole life, and not merely in his "guarded, cryptic, sometimes evasive" public statements and writings about Ireland. For the feelings which he repressed about Ireland—partly by way of combating the attempt of his enemies to make him out a zealous Papist—were in fact expressed in his opposition to abuses of power in repressive institutions in India (the East India Company, Governor-General Warren Hastings) and in France (the Jacobins, the terrorists). Even though the "Great Melody" is seldom heard "against" intolerance in his native land, it gains force and eloquence in other contexts because of its underlying presence.

The other informing assumption—some would say obsession—of O'Brien's book is that something like a systematic belittling of Burke

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took place earlier in this century as a reaction to the Whig interpretation of history. Insofar as Burke was a hero to Macaulay and G.O. Trevelyan, just so far must his stature be reduced in the hands of Lewis Namier and his disciples. Much of O'Brien's Introduction is taken up with arguing that a generation of English undergraduates was infected with Namier's debunking of Burke—a debunking that took place mainly through Namier's ignoring or downplaying his significance as a mind and a politician. Although this Namierite reaction is pretty much over, O'Brien finds it surviving in L.G. Mitchell's introduction to volume VIII of the Clarendon Press edition of Burke's writings and speeches.[2] Mitchell's "assiduous intimations of Burke's worthlessness" O'Brien sees as in the worst Namier tradition, so he raises his own melody against this abuse of the historian's power. In other words, *The Great Melody* is a fighting book and if you're convinced that Burke was anyting less than a heroic figure it will provoke and irritate.

Predictably, reviews of the book have uncovered the reviewer's politics. In the *TLS* (Oct. 4, 1992) E.P. Thompson, the Marxist historian of the English working class, accuses O'Brien of employing his pen "as a shillelagh" in the hunting down of Burke's Namierite detractors. Thompson has praise for the sections of "enlightening commentary" that concern Burke's parliamentary work on behalf of the American colonies in their resistance to the Crown, and for the section on India and Burke's dogged pursuit of Warren Hastings and of the East India Company that had been energetically looting India's riches. But what Thompson cleverly and rather nastily calls "O'Burkian hyperbole" characterizes the book's attempt to emphasize at every possible moment Burke's Catholic associations and the depth, in his character, of the "Irish layer." Even more important—and for Thompson detrimental to the book's truth—is its lack of appreciation of the French Revolution as anything but wholly destructive. O'Brien, Thompson feels, is too uncritical of Burke's conservative identification of liberties and rights with landed property. He reminds him that George III, after reading the *Reflections*, congratulated Burke on supporting "the cause of the Gentleman," not a gesture that a historian of the working class can tolerate.

The opposite position may be said to belong to Harvey C. Mansfield, professor of government at Harvard and long-time scholar of Burke (he has edited a selection of Burke's letters).[3] Mansfield finds it the case that truth and justice have finally been meted out to the man,

[2] The Clarendon editor of THE WRITINGS AND SPEECHES OF EDMUND BURKE: Volume VIII, *The French Revolution 1790–1794*, ed. by *L. G. Mitchell.* Oxford, 1991. $130.00. O'Brien finds much more satisfactory Volume IX, *The Revolutionary War (1794–1797) and Ireland*, ed. by R. B. McDowell, Oxford (Clarendon), 1991. $160.00.

[3] *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke*, ed. and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Chicago, 1984). Mansfield's review of O'Brien's book is in *The New Criterion* (Nov. 1992).

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and he provides a handy list of instances of political action in which Burke, while never in the position of a significant office-holding Whig politician, was nevertheless instrumental in getting important things accomplished and was in no sense the "lackey" Namier called him. Mansfield notes some of these contributions:

> On America, the decision to repeal the Stamp Act and George III's decision to end the American war. . . . on Ireland, the Catholic Relief Act of 1793 and the disaster of the Irish rebellion in 1798; on India, Fox's East India Bill in 1783, establishing the principle of accountability in the proceedings against Warren Hastings; on France, a vindication of Burke's insights as responsible for his prophetic vision, and of Burke's side of his split with Fox, the creation of the Portland Whigs, the contest with Pitt over the "Regicide" peace, which was finally won by Burke.

There is much else, says Mansfield, and it all goes together as a whole.

As someone whose approach to Burke has been mainly "literary" (I first read anthology selections from his work in a course in eighteenth-century English writers given by Walter Jackson Bate—read him in the company of Johnson and Goldsmith, Cowper, Boswell and Gibbon, rather than of political theorists), I realize that my appreciation of him may be warped in the direction of the aesthetic. Mansfield, in the Introduction to his selection of letters writes that "Burke was a remarkable man because he was a remarkable thinker. One cannot confine his merit to his rhetoric and sum up his accomplishments as literary, while putting aside the substance of his thought as controversial or embarrassing. . . . His marvelous literary skills do not excuse us from taking him seriously, which requires taking his thought seriously as political philosophy." That seems cogent and worth keeping in mind. But perhaps it applies more to some parts of the writings than to others. From the standpoint of 1993, probably the least controversial area of Burke's melody is the American one, since people don't argue these days about the rightness or wrongness of the Stamp Act or whether conciliation with the colonies should have been the course for England to have followed. So we are the more free to admire, without thinking about it under the category of "thought" or "political philosophy," the following famous paragraph from "On Conciliation with America," quoted by O'Brien as an instance of Burke's great melody as it plays out the manner in which "the people of New England have of late carried on the whale fishery":

> Whilst we follow them among the tumbling mountains of ice, and behold them penetrating into the deepest frozen recesses of Hudson's Bay and Davis's Straits, whilst we are looking for them beneath the arctic circle, we hear that they have pierced into the opposite region of polar cold, that they are at the antipodes, and engaged

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> under the frozen serpent of the south. Falkland Island, which seemed too remote and romantic an object for the grasp of national ambition, is but a stage and resting-place in the progress of their victorious industry. Nor is the equinoctial heat more discouraging to them, than the accumulated winter of both the poles. We know that whilst some of them draw the line and strike the harpoon on the coast of Africa, others run the longitude, and pursue their gigantic game along the coast of Brazil. No sea but what is vexed by their fisheries. No climate that is not witness to their toils. Neither the perseverance of Holland, nor the activity of France, nor the dexterous and firm sagacity of English enterprise, ever carried this most perilous mode of hard industry to the extent to which it has been pushed by this recent people; a people who are still, as it were, but in the gristle, and not yet hardened into the bone of manhood. When I contemplate these things; when I know that the colonies in general owe little or nothing to any care of ours, and that they are not squeezed into this happy form by the constraints of watchful and suspicious government, but that, through a wise and salutary neglect, a generous nature has been suffered to take her own way to perfection; when I reflect upon these effects, when I see how profitable they have been to us, I feel all the pride of power sink, and all presumption in the wisdom of human contrivances melt and die away within me. My rigour relents. I pardon something to the spirit of liberty.

This is superbly orchestrated, carrying the reader-listener irresistibly along, eliciting admiration and agreement—although one doesn't so much "agree" with it as register and approve it. The best thing to do with such a feat of happy rhetoric is to read it again, perhaps memorize it. ("On Conciliation" was once required reading in American high school courses in rhetoric.) For that reason Burke's "marvelous literary skills" (in Harvey Mansfield's phrase) may make it more, rather than less difficult, to take his thought "seriously as political philosophy."

The India phase of Burke's great melody occupied the years 1783–1790 especially and Burke's remorseless pursuit of Warren Hastings has seemed to some observers excessive, as if he were as ruthless, in this single-minded endeavor, as Hastings himself. Here Burke worked beautifully in concert with Charles James Fox, with whom he would fatefully fall out over the French Revolution. But his speech on Fox's East India Bill (which substituted a Parliament-appointed commission responsible to Parliament, for the East India Company's board of directors responsible only to its proprietors), is among other things a wonderfully expressive portrait of India as a civilization:

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> This multitude of men does not consist of an abject and barbarous populace; much less of gangs of savages, like the Guaranies and Chiquitos, who wander on the waste borders of the river of Amazons, or the Plate; but a people for ages civilized and cultivated; cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods. There, have been (and still the skeletons remain) princes once of great dignity, authority, and opulence. There, are to be found the chiefs of tribes and nations. There is to be found an antient and venerable priesthood, the depository of their laws, learning, and history, the guides of the people whilst living, and their consolation in death; a nobility of great antiquity and renown; a multitude of cities, not exceeded in population and trade by those of the first class in Europe; merchants and bankers, individual houses of whom have once vied in capital with the Bank of England; whose credit had often supported a tottering state, and preserved their governments in the midst of war and desolution; millions of ingenious manufacturers and mechanicks; millions of the most diligent, and not the least intelligent, tillers of the earth. Here are to be found almost all the religions professed by men, the Braminical, the Mussulmen, the Eastern and the Western Christians.

And on in this vein of expansively sympathetic portraiture. As with the passage about the American colonies, the melody, if one really listens to its cumulative repetitions and echoings, its massive leisurely summoning-up of what was once a great civilization, has the effect of commanding assent much more powerfully than were it presented to us, less rhetorically, as "objective" political ideas whose rightness we embrace with disinterestedness.[4]

That last word brings to mind Matthew Arnold who, in a dramatic moment in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," cites a passage from Burke's 1791 "Thoughts on French Affairs" in which Burke claims to be done with the subject of the Revolution and even imagines the possibility that "this mighty current in human affairs" may be irresistible. Arnold found it—surprisingly, it must be said—"one of the finest things in English literature" and saluted "That return of Burke upon himself" as a prime example of living by ideas rather than within the language of party and personal inclination. But in Arnold's eagerness to make a dramatic point, he spoke as if these "Thoughts" ("among the last things Burke wrote") really came at the end of his career, when in fact they would be succeeded by the

[4] In his *History of English Prose Rhythm* (1912), George Saintsbury devotes a few pages to Burke, "scanning" sentences by marking them into the equivalent of poetic feet, with long and short stresses. He is concerned to describe "the juxtaposition of long sentences and short; of rising and falling clauses; . . . the vowel-sound of the paralleled word-groups" and so forth.

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white-hot satirical energy of the four *Letters on a Regicide Peace*. There Burke returned to his excoriation of the Revolution and of any faltering on England's part in continuing to prosecute her war with France. Having broken with Fox and most Whigs over the Revolution,[5] and in alliance with Pitt and the Tories even though he knew Pitt was exploiting him for purposes of maintaining power, Burke became increasingly skeptical, even cynical, in his attitudes toward England—and, O'Brien maintains, toward the heritage of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. No longer do we have the "idealised view of the British Constitution" that made its final appearance in the lively "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs" (1791). By 1796, when *Letters on a Regicide Peace* began to appear, "The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, which Burke had liked to evoke on appropriate occasions, are now dismantled, like Warren Hastings' Indian opera." From now on his references to the actual workings of British politics are bleak and often savagely sardonic.

Yet this "negative" animus makes *Letters on a Regicide Peace* more rather than less engaging in its polemical sweep. Now that Pitt was making overtures for peace with France, and had also, Burke felt, betrayed his friend Fitzwilliam and the Irish Catholics, he could feel "released from that self-imposed thralldom" (O'Brien's words) the alliance with Pitt had necessitated. The tragic death of his son Richard in 1794 may have also contributed not only to Burke's desolation, but to his determination in the Regicide Peace letters to let it all hang out, as if—like Frost's image of himself as a poet—all he cared about was "what a hell of a good time" he had doing it.[6] Consider a magnificently immoderate sentence like the following from the first letter (actually the second in order of composition):

> The Republic of Regicide, with an annihilated revenue, with defaced manufactures, with a ruined commerce, with an uncultivated and half-depopulated country, with a discontented, distressed, enslaved, and famished people, passing, with a rapid,

[5] The *Parliamentary History* records the break with Fox in memorable terms: "Mr Fox rose to reply: but his mind was so much agitated, and his heart so much affected by what had fallen from Mr Burke, that it was some minutes before he could proceed. Tears trickled down his cheeks, and he strove in vain to give utterance to feelings that dignified and exalted his nature." Surely a great moment in the theater of politics.

[6] Burke's only son contracted tuberculosis of the trachea and died in a few days (ten days previously to his illness he had been elected to Parliament). O'Brien writes that:

> As he lay dying, he asked if it was raining. His father told him that the noise was the wind rustling through the trees. Richard then spoke his last words: three lines from Adam's morning hymn in Book V of *Paradise Lost*, a favourite passage of his father's:
>
> His praise ye winds, that from four Quarters blow,
> Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops, ye Pines,
> With every Plant, in sign of Worship wave.

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> eccentric, incalculable course, from the wildest anarchy to the sternest despotism, has actually conquered the finest parts of Europe, has distressed, disunited, deranged, and broke to pieces all the rest, and so subdued the minds of the rulers in every nation, that hardly any resource presents itself to them, except that of entitling themselves to a contemptuous mercy by a display of their own imbecility and meanness.

Here, even more than in *Reflections*, Burke's hair-trigger pen is less concerned to analyze and diagnose than to confront—with its own verbal violence—the violent abuse of power exercised by France. We have moved away from Arnoldian disinterestedness (if we were ever there, with Burke) into a much more highly inflamed, excitingly unbalanced realm of display.

And indeed even early admirers of Burke like Arnold and John Morley (who wrote the splendid entry on him in the eleventh edition of the *Britannica*) pointed to excesses and inadequate understandings in his attitude toward the Revolution. All the more likely then that an astute contemporary political theorist like Alan Ryan of Princeton (see his important review of *The Great Melody* in the *New York Review of Books*, Dec. 3, 1992) is struck by how, in his writings about the Revolution, Burke fails to be the "pluralistic liberal" O'Brien would have him be. Ryan finds it easy to resist what he takes to be Burke's, and by extension O'Brien's, wish that what happened to France could be undone: "the disputable point is whether, granted the violence and the chaos, but granted also the subsequent history of France—we can really wish that the Revolution had never happened." What Ryan, and, surely E.P. Thompson are lamenting, is that O'Brien could have become so much of a counterrevolutionist as to side one-sidedly with Burke in his own counterrevolutionary activities. After Mary Wollstonecraft had read Burke's *Reflections*, she wrote (in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*) that "had you been a Frenchman, you would have been, in spite of your respect for rank and antiquity, a violent revolutionist. Your imagination would have taken fire." Yes, answers O'Brien, if Burke had been born in 1760 in a French village, we can imagine him as a revolutionary; but in fact he was born in Dublin in 1729. And in response to Thomas Paine's famous comment that Burke, in his fondness for the overthrown French royalty, "pities the plumage and forgets the dying bird," O'Brien notes how the comment has been used to "squelch sympathy with the victims of the Russian and Chinese revolutions." (A footnote mentions a further application of it, in 1977, to Northern Ireland, with the Protestant working class as the "plumage.")

My guess is that in order to write a book as passionate as *The Great Melody*, you must risk a certain amount of un-balance, becoming an advocate for your man in a way more dispassionate academic theorists like Alan Ryan have no cause to. As for Burke himself, if—as Arnold

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claimed—he and Swift were the two classics of English prose, it may be that, no more than with Swift, is it necessary to wish Burke had written differently than he had or attained more balance on certain issues, particularly on France. When Burke was dying in 1797, Charles James Fox attempted to have a final reconciling meeting with him. Burke's wife Jane wrote back to Fox, thanking him, but saying that it

> has cost Mr Burke the most heart-felt pain to obey the stern voice of his duty in rending asunder a long friendship, but that he deemed this sacrifice necessary; that his principles remain the same; and that in whatever of life yet remained to him, he conceives that he must live for others and not for himself. Mr Burke is convinced that the principles which he has endeavoured to maintain are necessary to the welfare and dignity of his country, and that these principles can be enforced only by the general persuasion of his sincerity.

Who of us, in a similar situation, would not have embraced the opportunity to be reconciled with a sometime ally and protégé? O'Brien explains that, in his opinion, Burke didn't do it because the meeting would have signified that differences of principle, in the last analysis, weren't all that important. Instead he "wanted the political world to know that these principles are of transcendent importance to him, and that Fox is still outside the pale, in terms of these principles." Another way to put it was Yeats's in "Blood and the Moon":

> And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,
> That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century
> after century,
> Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality.

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Poetry Chronicle

THE BOOKS IN THIS CHRONICLE fall roughly into two groups, a division that leads me to suppose that a poet never writes a really, *really* good poem before turning fifty. That supposition, that sometimes falsified inductive truth, that regulative ideal, is a comfort and torment to those of us who haven't yet hit the half-century mark. Why are poets such late bloomers? It's not simply that poetry requires wisdom, though it does. It's also that poetry requires a distinctive voice, a way of handling language with brilliant particularity. For most poets, a refined and powerful management of, or accommodation to, language arises only after decades of practice.

The first three books I'll discuss are full of energy, vigor, novel insight, and passionate determination to criticize, praise, escape, embrace. The virtues of youth, bless it, without which our social life would slouch and relapse. Yet the poetic language of these books is on the whole quite undistinguished; after reading the poems, I recall certain general insights, but few lines replay themselves on my inner ear.

The interest of *Sleeping Preacher*[1] by Julia Kasdorf lies in its depiction of Amish society, seen from the perspective of one of its daughters who has gone off to the big city to escape, regret, and reflect upon it. The world she has abandoned is peculiar for self-enclosures that mark the flesh as well as spirit.

> At the Yoder reunion, there are always more children
> than grown-ups. Outside the white, Amish school
> they run barefoot, identical: girls with buns
> under starched coverings, boys in blue shirts
> and suspenders. In the basement between long tables
> of food, cousins and aunts trace family lines
> that grow tangled and thick as root-bound plants:
> two sisters who married two brothers
> makes their twenty-some children twice cousins.
>
> "Freindschaft"

[1] SLEEPING PREACHER, by *Julia Kasdorf*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $17.95; $9.95.

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In this passage, the language is plain; the sole simile is a variant on the family tree, looking down to the roots rather than up to the branches. And the metrical pattern is indistinct: it yearns towards something in dactyls, with perhaps four feet, but is too shy to say so.

Kasdorf, however, will not let the reader take this unadorned view of Amish folk as an idyll. In succeeding poems, she tells us about the brother who killed grackles, the cousin who smashed cats against barn walls, the neighbor who violated a little girl with "his tobacco-sweet tongue against her teeth," and the child's silence. The old Adam surges up even amidst the pacific Amish, but its daughters are not supposed to tell. The poet also lets us see how self-imposed isolation leads to errors of judgment, and at the same time makes possible a certain pure generosity: "I learned from my mother how to love / the living, to have plenty of vases on hand / in case you have to rush to the hospital / with peonies cut from the lawn, black ants / still stuck to the buds."

Like Kasdorf, Amy Uyematsu speaks in *30 Miles from J-Town*[2] of a community living in an isolation, partly elected and partly imposed, that as a rebellious daughter she wishes to move beyond. But the place she wishes to move towards is not just the hip, urban American West Coast setting she grew up in, but a Japan of the imagination: "Even my mother has taught herself / to acquire the taste of butter & bread, / but I refuse. Every night I must make / two cups of rice— / after washing the grains, / the level of water measured exactly, / only as high as the first groove / on my third finger. / This is essential, / for Japanese rice is wetter than others." The poet's allegiance to a ritual that she has both learned and had to reinvent for herself has a nice solemnity and fitness to it; it begins a poem entitled "Rice Planting" which goes on to observe: "Rice is the staple of farmers and monks— / nothing is wasted."

All the same, the language has no magic. It lights up best when Uyematsu mixes street talk and bits of almost forgotten Japanese, but then the magic is somehow piecemeal, accidental. Those lines have a special energy: "I'd recognize him by the white suit / he wears every night. Pachuco stance. / Nothing rushed. Leans back into a stride / that boys learn early on the streets. / Keeps his eyes well hidden behind shades. / No question he's a buddhahead— / those thick bushido eyebrows, / his straight black hair combed high and back, / a casual wisp against the pale forehead." Yet the wit, the glinting words, are not integrated into a powerful poetic language that would be adequate to the intensity of what I think the poet understands.

The next book strikes me as skewed by its author's apprenticeship to a certain kind of creative writing program. Michael White's language is rich in subordinate clauses and its diction is intentionally

[2] 30 MILES FROM J-TOWN, by *Amy Uyematsu.* Story Line Press. $11.95.

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literary. In *The Island*[3] it often escapes his intentions when it sounds merely literary, running through aural and metaphoric effects that belong to the workshop in general, and not his particular voice. The poem "Flight: Homage to Vladimir Nabokov" is a set piece, the recreation of a moment in the life of a significant literary figure, decorated by nice landscape and cultural allusions: "Massing beneath him, / A hazy, burnt-gold Claude Lorrain cloud / Suffused the canyon as if with its own light . . ." And here is the opening stanza of "The Island": "After a week of running before a norther, / Flying with full canvas over a violet sea, / We lost our stern wind off a strange isle's shore, / Furled sail, and leveled oars to the limpid water." This sounds like a good imitation of Pound, or of Fitzgerald's translations; behind the lessons well learned, the bookish diction ("full canvas," "violet sea," "limpid water"), White's voice is indistinct. But at least the lines are musical, and the music is both controlled and vigorous.

Indeed, because White works with richer linguistic means than either of the two preceding poets, he comes closer to moments of achieved poetry. When experience bears down hardest upon him, then he can rise to meet it, and his expressive means seem most his own. Certain passages about the death of his wife have this quality, and others where an experienced strangeness comes over him. In the middle of the poem "The View," he describes an old farmhouse on the edge of ruin, where he stopped with a friend on a moonlit night.

> I couldn't see
> The warped and fire-warmed floorboards underfoot,
> And the place had got so wind-loose and rackety,
> That what light there was—pale strokes of moonlight sieved
> Through knots and nailholes in the siding—*shifted*
> Slightly with each step, skewed back and forth
> So much I felt like a fish, or a ghost, or a drunk.
> I moved through a darkness more pronounced for the weird light
> Needled into it, through a doorless door
> To the last room at the far end of the house . . .

The poet's vision as he looks out from the "last room" is a bit too Wordsworthian, but the passage itself, through the doorless door, has the true ring of poetry.

The books of the next two poets who are just on the edge of turning fifty, Margaret Holley and Alfred Corn, strike me as rather uncannily supporting my thesis. (I realize that principles determine facts, at the same time as facts determine principles.) In both books, one can see poems that are finally, beautifully achieved rising above, or out of, or by means of, other poems that have the indistinctness of youth.

[3] THE ISLAND, by *Michael White*. Copper Canyon Press. $10.00p.

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In Alfred Corn's *Autobiographies*,[4] the most linguistically hazy poems are in fact about Corn's youth, now wandered far from and pondered in a long, multipartite poem entitled "1992." In each section, a fragment of autobiography is compacted with the biography (or, in the Whitmanian spirit of the book's title, autobiography) of an Other. The closer the autobiographical poem-parts stand to the actual detail of Corn's life, to my mind the less poetically, linguistically arresting they become. Any longish narrative poem will run the risk of becoming prosy in places, because a certain amount of scene-setting and getting from here to there must be accomplished. All the same, Wordsworth and Homer set the standards, and show that there are ways to avoid this poetic flatness and still get the story told.

Some parts of "1992" are stronger than others, but the shorter poems in the book's first thirty-five pages show best what Corn is capable of. He can tell a good story, and not fail to locate its metaphysical shadow, in language that is fresh, precise, nuanced, witty, grave, beautiful. Here, for example, is the last half of "The Jaunt," where the speaker has decided not to go off on a riverboat party.

> When the springy net of sparkles has shrunk and faded
> Out of sight, the last rough throb been coaxed
> From the tenor sax's frog-in-the-throat, the final
> Needling tremolo of the clarinet been wrapped up
> In distance, suddenly it is strange to be here
> In lilac afterglow with trout-leap and mayfly . . .
> Strange, too, how our part of the river continues
> To trundle along its tonnages of water and motion.
>
> The unused ticket spins to the ground.
> As much as any person not two people
> I miss the jaunt, for just this one hour of dusk . . .
> Then, a veiled echo, my name called as I turn
> To answer, eyes adjusting to where we are
> At the pivot of night, the cusp of light.
> Light enough to feel our way back to the grove
> Of alders along the curving path beside the river;
> Light enough to recognize my life when I see it,
> Going in its direction, more or less at the same pace.

Corn's language here is pungent and lyrical at the same time, in unexpected, deft combinations that I hear as peculiarly his own, for he carries out that tonal zeugma so often, and to such varied and moving effect.

[4] AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, by *Alfred Corn.* Viking. $19.00.

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Margaret Holley's voice in *Morning Star*[5] can be too pretty-literary, like Michael White's, or too explanatory-prosaic, like Alfred Corn's. Yet both failings serve a purpose (as they do in the work of White and Corn), for they reveal a poet struggling for music and for a *logos*, an account. When Holley does find the path through the forest of words, she writes poetry of remarkable insight and expressiveness. In "Spinoza's Gold," she considers a figure not often invoked in American poetry, Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza, who was cut off from the Jewish community in Amsterdam because of his radical philosophical beliefs, which also brought him the enmity of the Catholic church. The poem captures the strangeness and purity of Spinoza's systematic vision, in which time, good and evil, and even individuation are presented as mere phenomena, mist that the intellectual love of God will shine through yet never wholly burn away. At the moment of his banishment, the poet imagines him, "a seraph in common clay," walking through the city, past the Breede Straat,

> where Rembrandt persists in spilling the gold
> of this late July afternoon over blind Jacob
> blessing Joseph's sons, Ephraim, Manasseh,
>
> painting to please himself, they say stiffly,
> creditors' letters piling up on the floor,
> painting, in fact, from an older testament,
>
> the human still life flooded with sunlight
> and the dark mystery of love. Past bridge
> after burning bridge over Amstel's silver water
>
> and over the city's limit into the world
> where every thing is a modification of God:
> the silent faces behind him, the summer road's
>
> untrammeled galaxies of dust, bees laboring,
> the whole meadow humming, the nest hidden,
> the seat of thought borne in its bowl of earth.

Holley makes Rembrandt's activity as an artist seem the objective correlative of Spinoza's conception of human activity: the self, fragile in its phenomenality, maintaining its wholeness against threatening forces. Approaching the age of fifty, both Holley and Corn find in constraint, in limits, the source of illumination.

The last three poets I will discuss in this chronicle are all over the hill of fifty; indeed, they were all born in and around 1930. Their view

[5] MORNING STAR, by *Margaret Holley*. Copper Beech Press. $9.95p.

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from the other side is often acerbic, their bitterness and disillusion wholly justified by the nature of reality. The world *is* an appalling place. However, it is the only place we have, and it is not just appalling: the enchantments each poet manages to wring from, ring from, the unlikely matrix of reality are all the stronger and all the more persuasive.

X. J. Kennedy's *Cross Ties: Selected Poems* was published in 1985. The poems in his latest collection *Dark Horses*[6] are as usual quite formal, and in this context it is as if strict rules were required to rein in chaos. The poetry is mordant, funny, and even sometimes rather frightening; the poet, so much in control of his formal means, seems himself rather dismayed by the fearful things he points to. "The Arm" achieves a chilling moment worthy, and reminiscent, of Emily Brontë. Combining a childhood memory of finding a severed arm floating in a river (which is then brandished by a malignant friend named Snaker) with dream, Kennedy writes, ". . . And so I tried / Not fearing it, tried all night long, but still / Night after night the arm, / Joined to a wrinkled baby with no nose / And cratered eyes would tap my windowpane, / Its cries squeezed shrill from trying to break through: / *Why do you leave me out here in the rain? / It's dark and cold. Let me come sleep with you.*"

On the whole, though, Kennedy's mode is not horror, but satire. In "The Woodpile Skull," he moves between the two and turns satire on himself, addressing the severed head of an ant whose "guillotine" was his chainsaw. By combining a reference to Shakespeare with Ogden Nash-like rhymes, he brings the poem to a conclusion that has the ring of truth precisely because it is so bizarre.

> This dying, though a country mile from great,
> Leads me to think less of whatever Fate
> Parts heads from shoulders with indifference,
> Decrees the moment of our going hence.
> I wouldn't put it past Their Enmities
> To thin us out as winter winnows trees
> With sudden unpremeditated blows
> And bask in comfort from our overthrows.
>
> Wind wedges through my woodpile. But this chill
> Comes from a sense that, blindly, I can kill
> And be killed. Bemused and metaphoric,
> I stand, ham Hamlet to a formic Yorick.

Bleak as the conclusion is, the poet who stands behind it modifies the very *frisson* he calls up in the reader: after all, he can crack a joke,

[6] DARK HORSES, by *X. J. Kennedy.* Johns Hopkins University Press. $26.00; $10.95.

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write a compact, perfected line, and maintain a fire. That beats writing mediocre verse in a cold garret, and laboring under the condition of mortality anyway.

Jayanta Mahapatra lives in Cuttack, India; his *Selected Poems* was published by Oxford University Press five years ago. In *A Whiteness of Bone*,[7] he writes obsessively about the death of his father, and the dishevelment of Indian society around him. The poems multiply themselves because he cannot escape personal loss and public destruction, and they correspond to, or perhaps more accurately, come up to the level of, his mysterious, beautifully achieved poetic voice because the inescapability is grounded in love. Underneath filial and patriotic duty lies affection.

In "With Broken Wings," set in the rainy season of summer, he calls up the ghost of his grandfather, and his mother's voice, as "The old brick walls of my house / go down into shadow." Mahapatra writes a free verse that tends to become misty or smoky with its references, a habit that in the work of other poets makes me impatient; but in this special case the tendency simply seems true to its object.

> All legend,
> both what lives on and what dies—
> the hills on the river's far side misting with sleep,
> the trapped edges of spread-out rice fields,
> even the lower primary schoolchildren, whose eyes
> turn away from beauty wet with rain,
> while the scent of smouldering wood
> floats its slow longing from the trees.
>
> As I get up, this desire,
> an egret with broken wings in the rain-pool of memory,
> passes, its slow steps falling, one by one,
> unnoticed in the darkness.

Here, woodsmoke is not the signature of Their Enmities, but a domestic longing that is both sexual and remorseful; it's a rising, lofting, floating memory of flight.

Mahapatra as a poet doesn't merely speak for himself as a man, but for his countrymen, and -women, in a public mode that is often explicitly (though never dogmatically) political. For example, "A Morning Walk in Bhopal" begins: "A road, going somewhere, / cranking silence from the morning light / or perhaps from the autumn of my fear. / At times I see someone walking down *it* / looking at me through the skies of my pain. / That road leads to the edge of the earth / where water slips with sad voice and falls. / As though a

[7] A WHITENESS OF BONE, by *Jayanta Mahapatra*. Penguin. $9.00p.

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procession approaches, / moving slowly, to the beat of drums, / returning me to memory as to a hollow silence . . ." The protest is muted, and the principles invoked are the privileges of life over death, ambiguous, multifarious. As Mahapatra says, "Poetry doesn't have to raise its voice."

The Path to Fairview[8] is Julia Randall's New and Selected Poems, a volume long overdue as testimony to one of the most luminous, exact, and severe voices of the older generation of American poets. Since I discovered her poetry in the mid-seventies, some of Randall's poems have taken up permanent residence in my ear and heart; the best of her poems, once heard, cannot be unheard. Autumn never occurs to me now without the words "Octobre, cadenza. One would always know, / in this rude land, these colors and their close, / the Indian pomes, Valhalla's roofs ablaze, / poet and peasant in the glow of things / reading of earth and sky the finite rhymes" ("Hardwood Country"). Nor can I bid a formal farewell without saying it, or rather, hearing it echoed, twice, as in the poem "Departure."

> Where is the emperor, where is the clown,
> where is the great-haired lady? Stone.
>
> Where is the bird that purchased here
> on mossy head and marble gear
> mistaking quarry for the bough?
>
> I hear his crazy vespers now
> for grace and guard, the double call
> along the shadowy groves at Coole
> bidding the sycamores farewell.
> Farewell.

The new poems in this New and Selected contain many fine discoveries, some with unlikely titles: "Grackles," "Video Games," or "Silence." My favorite is entitled "The Clearing." It is quite philosophical, and yet not abstract, full of the close observations of an unofficial naturalist and environmentalist, perfect in its music. Literary, historical, threatening, elegiac, it is what a poem should be. It begins, "There are some birds—thrasher, chat— / that love a tangle. We've got that / in Maryland, as in any state / with honeysuckle. There are some / birds love a stump, a riddled bole, / a rot-rich windfall. Even so / the farmer thinks I'm crazy not to clear / my woodlot for the fire." And, having meditated upon the need for both tangle and clearing, upon the lost America of the native Indians and what industrial development has done to it, she concludes,

[8] THE PATH TO FAIRVIEW, by *Julia Randall.* Louisiana State University Press. $24.95; $14.95.

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What shall restore
cedar and sycamore, sweet springs,
the secrets of the forest floor, where now
backhoes and scaffoldings
and gray computers set us free
to manufacture loves and lifeless things
along the steely groves where no bird sings?

Reader, you must buy the book and read the whole poem. I wish this had been the poem read to the public on Inauguration Day, for its moral and political import are as tangled and clear as its poetic quality.

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FELIX STEFANILE

Dante as His Own Rival

THESE TRANSLATIONS OF DANTE, by diverse hands, give us a Dante juxtaposed into a sequence of differing voices, styles, and attitudes towards translation.[1] An inevitable attribute of the book then is the sound of gears shifting. Let us get a sample of this, as one poet ends his canto, and the poet immediately following picks his up:

> Here he gently
> set his burden down;
> gently, since the scree
> was steep and rough,
> hard going,
> even for a chamois,
> And here another valley
> Was revealed to me.
> (Canto XIX, ll. 258–265,
> C. K. Williams)

> The new pains of Hell that I saw next demand
> new lines for this Canto XX of the next Canzon,
> which is of those submerged underground.
> Readying myself at the cliff's brink, I looked down
> into the canyon my master had revealed
> and saw that it was watered by tears and pain.
> (Canto XX, ll. 1–6, Robert Pinsky)

The change in musical register is obvious. This happens throughout the book, and the ratcheting of tonalities varies from poet to poet. The reader can get no feeling for Dante's massive fluency, or the authority of full-voiced epic. Vergil, "the voice of human reason" in the *Inferno,* is also fragmented. Along with twenty Dantes we get twenty Vergils. Here is one of them:

> A man or woman may lay violent hands upon
> themselves,

[1] DANTE'S INFERNO: Translations by 20 Contemporary Poets, ed. by *Daniel Halpern.* With an Introduction by *James Merrill* and an Afterword by *Giuseppe Mazzotta.* The Ecco Press. $24.95.

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upon their person, or their property,
and so, here in the second ring, each one who has deprived
himself
—by violence or by violent self-destructive disregard,
by dissipation—
of your world, your flesh—he who has wept
there where he should be joyous—
here in the second circle must and will
repeatedly repent in vain . . .
(Canto XI, ll. 45–53, Jorie Graham)

That James Merrill, in his introduction to this book, and Giuseppe Mazzotta, in his afterword, are aware of this veering of poets that occurs every two cantos or so, is clear from the way each of them concludes his piece. Merrill speaks of Dante's mastery of genres, and Mazzotta, a Dante scholar, of the poet's hoard of "languages" from which he could draw to depict his characters and histories. What neither Merrill nor Mazzotta stresses in his optimistic conclusion about these poets' "styles" in relation to Dante's is that, setting genres and "languages" aside, the organ tone of Dante's rhetoric was *terza rima*, a 13,500-line ground bass. As Paolo Milano wrote, in his superb introductory essay to the Laurence Binyon Dante, ". . . . the arduous *terza rima*, without which the *Commedia* is unthinkable." Milano was not trying to get a law passed against non-*terza rima* translations of Dante, but reminding translators and readers of certain risks. Editorial bantering cannot relieve the poets in this book of their burdens, and their performances, various indeed, are far from even.

C. K. Williams offers an open and conscientious way out of the Dante dilemma. He presents a cleverly turned stanza, with a nimble, darting rhyme-scheme that shows off his nostalgia for Dante's rhyme. He gives us an echo, and it works for me. Let me quote from his section once again. The excerpt here is from the beginning of Dante's encounter with Pope Nicholas III, a sinner in the Hell of Simony. The sinner has been shoved head first into a stone urn reminiscent of the baptismal fonts of Dante's day, with his feet sticking out. The element is heat, not water. The Pope was a member of the Orsini clan, named for *Orso* (bear). The grim joke of this part of the Pope's conversation is the triangulation of *orsa* (Dante used the feminine form), with *borsa*, Italian for purse or pouch, and the sinner himself stuffed, like some gross coin, into a fiery purse or pouch. Williams gets over this semantic hurdle:

A true son of the bear,
eager to advance my cubs,
I stuffed money in my pocket
while I lived up there,

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and stuffed myself
into another pocket here.
(Canto XIX, ll. 138–143,
C. K. Williams)

Williams notes that as he was writing his poem he realized that the form it took had been influenced by Elizabeth Bishop's "The Moose." His relaxed poet's talk reminds me of a passage from John Ciardi's "Translator's Note" to the 1961 paperback edition of his *Purgatorio*: "I tried various sorts of ballad stanzas: they had no hope of being for anything but the wastebasket. Then I hit on what I may as well call dummy *terza rima*, which is to say, I kept the three-line unit but rhymed the first and third lines." In this connection, it is pertinent to observe that Ciardi is not mentioned in this book. Neither Halpern nor Merrill, in their gracious references to authors of "fine versions" of Dante, bring him up even in passing. Names abound, but not Ciardi's. A thirty-page Notes section uncovers not a single Ciardi item. It is as though, by some eerie Orwellian lapse, this poet-translator, and his work and fame, had been annulled.

Alfred Corn translated Cantos XXIX and XXX. In the context of my remarks, it is interesting to read his spare one-liner about his rhyme pattern: "For Dante's hendecasyllabic *terza rima*, I've substituted iambic pentameter, rhyming line one and three of each tercet." The absence of a Ciardi allusion here, as a matter of scholarly citation, is alarming. Let us leave the valley of the Ghosts of Unmention by quoting both Ciardi and Corn:

"What are you waiting for? Why do you stare
as if you could not tear your eyes away
from the mutilated shadows passing there?

You did not act so in the other pits.
Consider—if you mean perhaps to count them—
This valley and its train of dismal spirits

winds twenty-two miles round. The moon already
is under our feet; the time we have is short,
and there is much that you have yet to see."
(Canto XXIX, ll. 4–12, John Ciardi)

But Virgil asked, "What are you looking at?
Why let your gaze sink down and settle on
the sad dismemberment of souls like that?
You didn't do so at the other ditches.
Remember—for perhaps you plan to count them—

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twenty-two miles the curving valley stretches.
The moon's already dropped beneath our feet,
the time allotted us is very short,
many you haven't met remain to meet."
(Canto XXIX, ll. 4–12, Alfred Corn)

Contemporaneity in translating the old is always chancy. See what happens to Graham, excerpted above, when for *Puote omo* (man can, or may), she gives us "A man or woman may." She stirs up a nest of grammatical hornets, and masculine, feminine, singular, plural pronouns come buzzing out. She still ends up with the generic "he." This clutter is no way to resolve Dante here. The updating Carolyn Forché provides in Canto XXIV amounts to a failure of tact not based on serious principle:

The farmer with no food in his cellar
wakes and looks out over the white fields,
strikes himself in despair, then
Returns to his bed but can't be still
and can't do much of anything, so paces
in grief. . . .
(Canto XXIV, ll. 7–12, Carolyn Forché)

The peasant, who hath nothing now laid by,
Rises and looks and sees the field and lanes
All whitened; and thereat he beats his thigh,

Returns to his house, and to and fro complains, . . .
(Canto XXIV, ll. 7–10, Laurence Binyon)

This passage is central to the eighteen-line simile that opens the canto. Hoarfrost covers the fields where the peasant must bring his lambs to feed. The threatening weather is, by the extended comparison of the simile, Vergil's troubled face, and the dismayed man is Dante. Forché promotes the *villanello* of the Italian (which we get from the French as *villein*, now obsolete), to farmer. No other translator of Dante I know does this. For fodder she says food. She also gives the man a cellar and a bed, neither of which is mentioned in the original Italian, though they are nice homeowning touches for this *villanello*. The gratuitous bed destroys the cinematic pace of Dante's picture, and sentimentally psychologizes the direct, homely action. Note that Forché, from the word "then" in the third line of her quotation to the bitter end, takes nineteen words to say what both Dante himself (*Ritorna in casa, e qua e là si lagna*), and Binyon—his fourth line above—take nine words to do.

Charles S. Singleton's prose translation of the *Divine Comedy*, and

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the encyclopaedic commentaries that accompany it, are used by all students of Dante. Too often, and for longish periods, the murmur of this great scholar's versions runs through this book. Where in one place Singleton writes "supernatural," a poet has substituted "preternatural." Where Singleton writes "dissipates" (for the Italian verb form *fonda*, meaning to squander, waste, or "sink" into bankruptcy), another poet gets the locution "by dissipation," thereby diluting the original connotation of the verb. It is no scanting of this great prose text to state that Singleton applied too wisely results in the translation not of Dante, but of Singleton. The general effect, in this collection of individual styles, is of an undercurrent, a sub-style common to most of these poets, of transliterations, smooth, flat, lame. This reliance on a single text, judiciously ample, and sometimes old-fashioned in its English, is not calculated to inspire inventiveness or superior literary translation. Let a simple example, one tercet of Dante, lines 1 to 3 of Canto XIV, help us focus on this ubiquitous characteristic of the new *Dante's Inferno*. To save space, I omit annotations except for the author's name:

Poi che la carità del natio loco
mi strinse, raunai le fronde sparte
e rende'le a colui, ch'era già fioco.
(Dante)

Because the love of my native place constrained me, I gathered up the scattered twigs, and gave them back to him who was already faint of voice.
(Singleton)

Because the love I had for my native place
moved me, I gathered up the scattered leaves
and gave them back to him, his voice now faint.
(Charles Wright)

Because the charity of my native place
Constrained me, gathered I the scattered leaves
And gave them back to him, who now was hoarse.
(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

Dante's action here actually closes off an incident held over from the preceding canto. As they skirt the Wood of the Suicides Dante and Vergil are addressed by a sinner, imprisoned in a tree, whose broken voice issues from the torn and mangled branches the Harpies have fed on. Blood pours from the injured limbs, and the voice asks to have his ripped leaves gathered and placed by him. The poor soul speaks in the accent of Dante's own region in the upper world, and stirs

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Dante to pity. Longfellow's use of the word "hoarse" for *fioco* is desperately accurate, and registers the pathos of the wounded mouths. (Binyon gives us "faint and hoarse" in his version, Ciardi "hoarse.") Singleton, who was after Longfellow's time, clearly analyzes the connotations of *fioco* in two places in his comments on this passage, but most of the poets of this book go to Singleton for the Englishing, not the notes. Singleton, always cautious, often reserves his sensibility for his notes, and did so here. Longfellow shows how great translators can stretch, and not play safe.

Frequently the enlistment of Singleton (and Carlyle-Okey-Wicksteed too) by the poets of this book amounts to downright symbiosis. In the excerpts that follow I let my case rest with the evidence provided, and spare the reader further comment on this matter. I must concede here, though, that I am not prepared to state that Singleton got *his* version from Longfellow. We deal with lines 7 to 12 of Canto VI:

> I am in the third circle, place of eternal
> accursed, cold and thudding rain
> which in density and force is never new.
> Large hailstones, dirty water, and snow
> course down through the murky air,
> the ground that receives them stinks.
> (Galway Kinnell)

> I am in the third circle of the eternal, accursed, cold and heavy rain: its measure and its quality are never new; huge hail, foul water, and snow pour down through the murky air; the ground that receives it stinks.
> (Charles S. Singleton)

> In the third circle am I of the rain
> Eternal, maledict, and cold, and heavy;
> Its law and quality are never new.
> Huge hail, and water sombre-hued, and snow,
> Athwart the tenebrous air pour down amain;
> Noisome the earth is, that receiveth its stench.
> (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

The best advertisement for the Ecco Press book is Seamus Heaney's Canto I (also included in his recent book of poems). Heaney, we know, broods over language, like Dante:

> In the middle of the journey of our life
> I found myself astray in a dark wood
> where the straight road had been lost sight of.
> How hard was it to say what it was like

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in the thick of thickets, in a wood so dense and gnarled
the very thought of it renews my panic.
(Canto I, ll. 1–6, Seamus Heaney)

The "had been lost sight of" of the third line is a perfect rendering of *era smarrita*, those famous last words of Dante's very first tercet of the divine *Commedia*. The smudging effect of the passive voice replicates Dante's intention, the limpness of the lost soul. The trudging monosyllabics of the fourth line make their point soberly, to be suddenly tugged by the startling "in the thick of thickets," a superb reproduction of a great poet's fleeting, yet striking image, the *selva selvaggia*, even to the repeat of the first syllables. Observe also the echo of Italian hendecasyllabics concluding the third and sixth lines. Heaney's three cantos have impact.

Richard Wilbur's Canto XXV is a *terza rima* gem. His rhymes place their emphases with verve and hard sense, as in a twisting serpent's tail coiled into a "garrotte" that ties a "knot." In this chapter Dante's sinners go through intricate maneuvers of merging with each other, shape-shifting, and other gruesome metamorphoses:

And then they stuck together, as if made
of melting wax, and mixed their colors; nor
did either now retain his former shade:
Just so, when paper burns there runs before
the creeping flame a stain of darkish hue
that, though not black as yet, is white no more.
(Canto XXV, ll. 61–66, Richard Wilbur)

Merrill's introduction begins with this line: "Ours is an age of indefatigable (if not always great) translation." I agree with him. A full-page spread in the New York *Times* gives a celebratory account of the joint reading given by the Ecco Press Poets in New York City last May. The report mentions rather chattily that almost none of the poets were familiar with Italian, but "had dictionaries." The whole story has this breezy tone. Given our enthusiastically inquisitive and intertextual age I am astounded that no gifted and notable American poet of Italian descent, no poet with that special intimacy with the language and culture of Italy, was included in this "collective venture." The omission is egregious.

Two or three swallows, as we know, do not make a summer. The Ecco Press version of Dante's *Inferno* serves no real purpose, and seems to have no genuine audience in view. As an anthology of contemporary poets this book does not, for various reasons, stack up among the best. As a work for students in school the book's paucity of illustrative material is depressing. We are not even given a map of Hell. The notes at the end of the book are of some service, I guess, though only with supplementary material, in large doses, from a

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teacher. Dante scholars can have no interest in such a production, except, perhaps, for the curiosity of the thing. Real hostility, I should think, would come from this quarter, because Dante is not so much the goal of the book's production, but its occasion. Those whose careers are steeped in Dante do not consider him a curiosity.

Literary translators will not be all that thrilled either. So many of these versions of Dante show no motivation, no sense of challenge, and in certain circumstances Dante is bludgeoned. The attitude towards the material is, save in rare instances, questionable. Nowhere in this book does the reader find the opportunity, amid the chorus of voices and styles, to appreciate the high incentive of epic, the grand aim. The poets at their work in this collection are themselves, in intrinsic ways, cheated of responsibility. They are given no space for head notes, or even brief essays on their viewpoints on art, on Dante, on themselves and their task.

Most unjustly we are given a Dante as his own rival, a contestatory Dante who, for obvious reasons, cannot be team-taught. In place of narrative and sweep we are given a skit of perspectives, as in a trendy gallery. This is culture as tourism, not Dante. Fortunately for us all, Dante's reputation cannot suffer: his universal appeal remains, and we know where to go to find our translations of the real thing.[2]

[2] Three modern translators of Dante high on my list are John Ciardi (W.W. Norton & Co., 1970, now available in three volumes from Mentor Books), James Finn Cotter (Element Books, Inc., Rockport, Mass., 1990), and Dorothy L. Sayers (Penguin Books, Ltd., London, 1949, also available from Basic Books, Inc., N.Y.). For each of these Dante has provided unique inspiration. Ciardi, a talented poet, wanted to make the epic over again as a poem in English. Cotter concentrates on the book as a profound spiritual experience in a great tradition still open to us all. Sayers, a redoubtable medieval scholar, wanted to present the sublime poet as a prize of the classical past. In each case these translators succeeded admirably, and offer their own special rewards.

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THOMAS FILBIN

Eurofiction, Interest Rates, and the Balance of Trade Problem

AMERICAN FICTION THESE DAYS seems generally to have recovered from its bout with minimalism. Scorched earth prose which prefers epiphanies and resonances to themes and character exposition has largely run its course. Readers could only be expected to tolerate for so long antiheroes who dream of things that never were and ask, "Why bother?", or who dream of nothing and say, "Turn the TV up, Rayette, 'Wheel of Fortune''s on."

Novels being written by Americans now have advanced to somewhat higher ground. They often deal with family trouble, moving on or stepping back, and the burdens of one's history on the ability to live in the present. The book jackets attest to the fact that the authors studied or teach in university writing programs, have won awards and fellowships, and come with the highest recommendations of other members of the guild. This would imply they are not without gifts and the skills of the craft, but they are making what to me is a dubious strategy choice, namely of limiting themselves to observing quotidian reality without transcending it, staking everything on one good rendering of the moment. My problem with books of this sort is that there isn't sufficient "what" to get involved with, despite the fact that the "how" has a certain polish. Most people will read something that engrosses them rather than what doesn't, and if a book isn't able to sustain your interest, exhortations and flogging by critics aren't going to make you guilt ridden enough to pick it back up again.

Current European novels, on the other hand, seem to be far more content heavy, more universal, and are as a result more engaging. If walking around bookstores on both sides of the Atlantic is any proof, there is a clear trade imbalance occurring. Very little contemporary American fiction is visible in the shops of the Left Bank or Charing Cross Road, while the shelves here are overflowing with work by satiric Britons, post-communist Russians, and East Europeans of every emerging nationality. Their writers have tapped rich veins of subject matter that are attracting American readers because of a higher "interest rate," if you will. We are doing no better at exporting fiction than computers or large sedans.

Some might claim unfair competition, that those regions of the world are inherently more interesting because of their past and

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present upheavals, but if our writers demand protectionist measures, we must refuse and keep the borders open. The new Europe might be sending us goods we need if our literary vision is ever to expand again to the subject of what our lives intend beyond their particulars. The books reviewed here pulled me in, stood and delivered, and found their center in the big stuff of meaning, identity, desire, and the struggle with the tyrannies of the state and our own human inadequacies.

Jaan Kross is an Estonian who spent nine years in Soviet labor camps and internal exile, and his 1978 novel,[1] translated into English for the first time by Anselm Hollo, was awarded the Literature Prize of Amnesty International's French affiliate in 1990. The enormous panorama of the post-Napoleonic Russian empire is the stage for the drama of Timotheus von Bock, a Baltic nobleman who scandalizes his class by marrying a peasant girl. Timo also has the misfortune to take at face value a vow he made to the czar always to tell him the truth. When he writes the sovereign to enumerate the injustices which exist, the "unalloyed" truth about the depravity of the nobility, the corruption of the state, and the oppression of the serfs, the answer is predictably nine years of confinement. He is only released when the government determines that the baron is insane, and whether that is the case or not becomes an underlying question of the book. Is it madness to assert one's conscience in a sea of despotism when the result will mean loss of individual liberty but have no impact on the regime? If one accepts the necessity of futile actions, Timo has taken up the mantle of tragedy and worn it heroically, but for the moral pragmatist he has merely evolved into a higher order of madman.

Kross is an exceptional storyteller, and he practices one of the most fundamental rules of realist fiction: write scenes, not narrative. The lives of men and women, the challenges to integrity and survival, the interchange of social relations and judgments is just as fecund a field as ever for a skilled hand. *The Czar's Madman* is tinged with dampness when it rains, and the silences of awkward moments weighed on me as if I were in the very rooms that held them. The author who came immediately to mind as possessing similar stylistic directness was Turgenev, while Timo bore a strong resemblance to the impulsive romantic Lermontov.

Ewa Kuryluk, although for the last decade a resident of the United States, is a Polish writer, artist, and art historian. The sensibility and subject of her first novel[2] is no less than the whole cultural, artistic, and literary legacy of European modernism. She makes ideas, persons, and events collapse in on themselves, so that in one moment we are with the Roman poet Propertius in Egypt, and are then trans-

[1] THE CZAR'S MADMAN, by *Jaan Kross*. Trans. by *Anselm Hollo*. Pantheon Books. $25.00.

[2] CENTURY 21, by *Ewa Kuryluk*. Dalkey Archive. $19.95.

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ported to be in Manhattan with Anna Karenina, a foreign correspondent for American journals who encounters Italo Svevo.

"I am driven by an ontological thirst . . . ," Anna tells us. The restless querying of post-ideological life is assimilated and recapitulated, and references and their referents make one's head spin sometimes in the rapidity of their enumeration. Goethe is reincarnated as president of a literary institute, Joseph Conrad meets Malcolm Lowry, and Moses Maimonides is in love with Djuna Barnes, who is dying of AIDS. This personalized encounter with the literary history of introspection betrays an underlying sorrow of the soul, a weariness of the traveler that touches us.

There is no lack of wit in Kuryluk's writing. She observes "The sacred cows sipping seltzer at Castelli's," and at a black-tie dinner party, "Mustard with your Virginia ham? No? Do I remember what? The parable of the mustard seed? The Bible? You wrote the Bible? You're writing it now? How fascinating! I can't wait to read it. Who's your publisher?"

In less skillful hands, this book could have become merely another absurdist rant by an overacculturated academic, but Kuryluk has managed to stand serenely amidst the post-Freudian ruins and give us a window onto her ideal modern psyche, one too liberated to believe in dogmas, but too spiritual to throw over metaphysics.

The English writer Adam Thorpe has been delivered of an ambitious book[3] (I say delivered because it has the immensity of a pregnancy and birth) which takes an invented village, Ulverton in Wessex, and plays back three hundred years of British history. Its short sections titled 1650, 1689, 1712, 1743, 1775, 1803, 1830, 1859, 1887, 1914, 1953, and 1988, extend from the Civil War to the predations of land developers in the eighties. The narrative voices from different points on this time line produce a cunning social archaeology of England.

Thorpe's artifacts of revelation are letters, sermons, drunken conversation, a photographer's caption notes, and even depositions from the legal proceedings against rural insurrectionist Luddites. Aristocrats from the manor, clergy, gentry, farmers, tradesmen, laborers, and paupers appear. Their interpretations of events vary with the age. Religion is a theme that underwrites every assumption in the seventeenth century, while divine providence is used to explain nothing by the twentieth.

Thorpe's encyclopedic knowledge of the ways and habits of ordinary life in an agrarian community creates a closed universe for the reader; he vividly and believably transports us into times when matters of food, shelter, and the vagaries of the weather were the main preoccupations. Mankind is the sum of its disasters and desires

[3] ULVERTON, by *Adam Thorpe*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $23.00.

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for Thorpe, and he has successfully created a sensate novel in which the smell of manure in the fields, the bite of the winter cold, and the noises of householding impress themselves upon us.

Some parts are crowded thickets of vegetation, wondrous but a challenge to wade through, such as the rambling slang of a Victorian era illiterate. Thorpe's method is to hang up a textual cork board for all sorts of thoughts to be pinned to, sometimes in slapdash exuberance, but this doesn't impede liking the book as a totality. *Ulverton* is canny, bold, and original.

Amidst all this European seriousness, it would logically fall to a witty London playwright to do something in a lighter vein which takes a humorous but accurate look at the inconsistencies in the lives of the altruistic. Michael Frayn has written a clever amusement[4] which deals with the question of what secrets should be kept secret, even by those who maintain there should be no secrets.

Terry Little is the founder of OPEN, a makeshift public interest organization quartered in a shabby little London building complete with its own doorway derelicts, whose purpose it is to expose the government's most wretched moments. With so much official mischief about, OPEN is a busy operation where the noise of the copier and the telephones form a backdrop for the neurotic quirks of Terry's company of reformers. The book starts in the middle of his latest quest, the attempt to unmask the true circumstances of the death of a Mr. Hassam while in police custody. In short succession Terry meets and has sex with a young civil servant from the Home Office, Hilary Wood, who is working on the Hassam coverup while wrestling with her conscience.

In his own home office, however, Terry behaves like any bureaucrat. He has been having a long-standing but unmentioned affair with one of his associates, but when Hilary quits her job to join OPEN, Terry and the others take to secrecy as naturally as spies to conceal the now complex sleeping arrangements.

This book walks a fine line between a comedic entertainment and farce, but always pulls in before it smacks of buffoonery. The characters are drawn craftily enough to be flesh and bones imperfect, not cartoons. Events make a mockery of their plans, signals get crossed, tempers flare, and Frayn seems to hold that our connections to one another are more throwbacks to the territorial impulses of early primates than poetic interchanges. "She smiles. Only it's not all warm and cheerful, her smile, like a nice shaded lamp being switched on over a corner table . . . , the way you hope it's going to be when a woman smiles. It's more like security lighting coming on. A bit white and meaningful. Carrying a definite suggestion to come no closer."

[4] NOW YOU KNOW, by *Michael Frayn*. Viking. $21.00.

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Frayn reminds us that even the most deadly earnest careerists and crusaders pay the price for their foibles, whether they realize it or not.

A writer's second novel is the crucible of many hopes. Was he lucky or good in a debut, and if so is there anything else he can say that is not a paraphrase of whatever wisdoms prompted the first book? *The South*, Colm Tóibín's 1991 novel, dealt with a woman's self-imposed exile, fleeing a bad marriage and the social prison of traditional Irish life. His achievement there was not only the creation of the right words but the right moods which suffuse the book with an overwhelming sense of loss or regret, or the inability to feel loss or regret, whichever is called for by the scene. He has managed to trump even his own ace with *The Heather Blazing*,[5] which is luminous and arresting, a story which takes us directly to the core of a man whose strength is more tragic than any weakness.

Eamon Redmond, a senior Irish jurist, contemplates retirement but is faced with summing up a lifetime of resolute self-reliance which has propelled him beyond his and anyone else's humanity. The death of his mother, a father's stroke, a solitary existence with his books and thoughts have made him averse to confiding or revealing. He has built a comfortable and accomplished life of rational deliberation, and manifests all the methodical habits of a judge. To anyone who postulates that people become what their profession dictates, Tóibín offers a more plausible psychology: we gravitate towards occupations which allow us to be what we are, for better or worse. In his marriage, relationships with his children and relatives, the absence of friends, his summer vacations in a house by the seacoast, he has realized the isolation he has always sought.

If all this suggests cold writing, that is not the case. Tóibín pursues the identity of a man of austere temperament, but not one blind to beauty in the world, only indisposed to using it as a vehicle to close the gap between himself and others. Some travellers need companions to talk with about the sights, others journey alone and internalize the experience.

This book has so much good writing that it sometimes causes you to stop in your tracks and breathe in what has just been said about the sea, a road, the sky. Tóibín invests places and landscapes not only with a sense of topography, but with meaning as they form the background for the most intense moments.

Eamon Redmond is both a stoic who repels us by taking refuge in the unfeeling world of rules, and at the same time a man suffering and behaving nobly. His decision on the petition of an unwed teenage mother to be allowed to return to her convent school after giving birth is totally detached from any principle of compassion, but in nursing his partially incapacitated wife he is manifestly selfless. If his love is

[5] THE HEATHER BLAZING, by *Colm Tóibín*. Viking. $20.00.

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more an act of duty than emotion, we can admire it even while pitying him. There are times when deliberate virtue costs more than mere spontaneity.

One of the drawbacks of being schooled in the classics is that it takes a while as a reader or a critic to accept certain books as great and even wondrous despite knowing they will never stand the test of time and be enshrined in the pantheon. But having accepted that, as all moderns should, it becomes all the more exciting to find a novel like *The Heather Blazing* which could quite believably to me be read in fifty or a hundred years and lose nothing of its impact.

Alan Lightman, who teaches physics and writing at MIT, is an American, but I include his novel *Einstein's Dreams*[6] in the import category for several reasons. His book is a meditation on the nature of time in the form of an imagined chronicle of Einstein's final months of formulating his theory of relativity. Set in Bern, Switzerland, the theme, events, and frame of reference are European. Perhaps this work is like the foreign cars "made" in America: the assembly takes place here, but the parts, design, and name are from another shore.

Einstein the patent clerk is dreaming of many different versions of time as it might otherwise have been. His imaginings are both waking and sleeping, and indeed he cannot now tell one state from the other, but it no longer matters. Time is not an absolute, but a connecting series of relations between objects, spaces, desires, and the mind.

What if, he realizes, this forward notion of time is neither necessary nor contingent, but even arbitrary? Effects might precede causes, time could stand still, speed ahead, or be merely circular. A lifetime could even be a single day where, "A person born in December . . . never sees the hyacinth, the lily, the aster . . . ," while, "When sunset comes, those born at sunrise wail at the disappearance of birds in the sky, the layered shades of blue in the sea, the hypnotic movement of clouds . . . A life is one snowfall . . . A life is the delicate, rapid edge of a closing door's shadow."

Einstein's Dreams is a religious event of secular physics which couples mystical vision with the scientific fervor to explain, and in turn it produces for the reader an emotional context to capture a great idea. This brief but relentlessly beautiful book expands our ability to imagine ordinary events in a way larger than the cursory notice we pay to them, something we should feel gratitude for as this is literature of realization and transcendence.

[6] EINSTEIN'S DREAMS, by *Alan Lightman*. Pantheon Books. $17.00.

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BRUCE BAWER

Family Values

SPIRE-SHAPED AND TALL AS A SKYSCRAPER, Chimney Rock—whose name Charlie Smith has borrowed for the title of his fourth novel—rises out of the western Nebraska prairie near what was once the Oregon Trail.[1] As Smith's protagonist, the thirtyish actor Will Blake, learns from his wife, Nebraska-born actress Kate Dunn, Chimney Rock "was the landmark the pioneers looked for on their way west. It was a sign, a proof, that they were traveling correctly, the first sign on the prairie of something other than grass seas forever. A kind of island, or introduction to the true West. . . . It was where the New World began, the place where those who had come to the New World and found it old, found a newer world."

Will and Kate, both of whose family roots lie in middle America, not only inhabit that newer world to the west but are New World royalty. Both top-rank movie stars (he's a show biz brat and Columbia University grad who "grew up on the soundstages and in the backlots of Hollywood, at home among painted characters, in the make-believe world that was the world"; she's a sometime country girl and congenital liar whom the filmgoing public knows as Zebra Dunn), they are touched in the public mind with immortality, and in rushing constantly from one glamorous corner of the globe to another to be preserved forever on celluloid they certainly seem like modern-day counterparts of the gods of Olympus. Yet they're as mortal as anyone else, and in fact belong to what might (with considerable understatement) be termed a dysfunctional family. The nature of that dysfunction and the extent of the damage it has engendered in their lives are, to be sure, a mystery that Smith only gradually reveals. But from the novel's outset it is manifest that something is terribly wrong. At the Academy Awards ceremony, Will loses an Oscar and (in one of the novel's many irrational acts of violence) sucker-punches the victor as he rises to accept; not long afterwards, when he hears gunfire on a street and sees a woman driving off with an automatic in her hand, he trails her in his car, only to end up getting shot—and eventually implicated in her murder.

What's come over Will? Well, it all has to do with the beautiful, gifted Kate and with Will's famously inclement father, Clement Blake, a boisterous, egomaniacal movie producer who's something of a

[1] CHIMNEY ROCK, by *Charlie Smith*. Henry Holt. $22.50.

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Hollywood deity, forever mounting wide-screen extravaganzas packed with fire and flood. Notorious for his ruthlessness and intractability, Clement has lured Kate into an affair and made her pregnant, and Will's compulsion to wreak revenge—a compulsion fueled by his memories of his brother's long-ago suicide (for which he blames Clement) and of the sex act he witnessed as a teenager between his friend Veronica and his mother, the movie star Jennie White—has had appalling consequences.

If *Chimney Rock* sounds like a wild, lush, brutal, morbid ride down the road of excess, it is. Not unusually for a Charlie Smith novel, it takes place in an intense, grotesque world "where anything goes," where "nature's limits are unknown," where "everything . . . is on its own," and where "there is no way . . . to penetrate deeply enough into the body and soul of another human being to know the first thing about them"—a world where bigger-than-life people tormented by memory and desire brawl, commit arson, and engage in incest, and, though haunted by the fact of mortality and by the ultimate pointlessness of all human activity, are incapable of sitting still for a moment. Devastating in its vision of tormented souls driven by both a lust for life and a fear of "what's in us that wants to live," the novel reminds one by turns of the movies *Chinatown* and *A Star Is Born*, of the detective fiction of Raymond Chandler, of Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (though at times *Chimney Rock* makes even West's book, with its grotesque situations and apocalyptic tumult, look like *Singin' in the Rain*), of the legendary Huston dynasty (Clement's dad, like Walter Huston, was a character actor who played grizzled old cowboy types), and—throughout—of the unbounded energy and delight of Will's great poet namesake.

Grim *mots* abound. Recalling a flesh-bound Nazi edition of *Faust* that he once saw in an exhibit, Will reflects: "There is no limit to what we can do. Nothing is beyond us." Contemplating the years of pain etched in his mother's wrinkles, he muses that "we are all going to suffer in ways we never heard of. . . . No wonder we decide to believe in God. There's nothing down here could dissolve pain like that." "Which of us," he asks rhetorically, "is not being dragged down forever?" Yet this book is also imbued with a passion for living, a recognition of death as a part of the package (Clement: "Death's the sound life makes"), and a determination to resist the darker forces that threaten the human soul's integrity. Why, Will asks, "are we born with the knowledge—fitfully, slowly recognized—that it is our job here on this grubby planet to keep hatred and despair from taking over our hearts?"

The susceptibility of the human heart to hatred and despair; the vulnerability of all precious and beautiful things to the bizarre horrors that the world can serve up without notice; the mad savagery of which seemingly sane and peaceable individuals are capable: these facts of life Smith illustrates in one graphic episode after another. In one

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scene, Clement kills a goat by biting into its throat; in another, Will runs his father's car off the road and into the ocean at sixty miles an hour, then swims from his own car to his dad's and begins choking him; in yet another, an irate, machete-wielding Will discovers Clement and Kate *in flagrante delicto* and carries out a Freudian punishment that is at once horrific and gruesomely funny. Indeed, like many sequences in recent movies (e.g., *Scarface*, *Goodfellas*), some of the more violent episodes in *Chimney Rock* are at once powerful and absurd, so extreme as to invite comparison with the Warners cartoon antics of Wile E. Coyote (with whom Will shares the frustration of having an apparently indestructible adversary). Significantly, it is love—in particular, his love for his late brother, for his wife, and (yes) even for his treacherous father—that drives Will to viciousness; for a key theme here is that the most terrible ferocity, indeed, often springs from the most ardent love. ("Love is brutal," Will observes, "then it's beautiful, then it's brutal again.")

Like all serious Hollywood novels, of course, *Chimney Rock* is not just about the Blakes' unorthodox family romance and movie-colony mores; it is also (in some sense) implicitly about America, the murky underside of the American dream, and the ironic contrast between the bright, flickering light-shows of the Dream Factory and the bleaker realities of all those people sitting out there in the dark. This contrast, as it happens, makes for some of *Chimney Rock*'s most memorable episodes. In one flashback, for instance, the glamorous Will and Kate visit Clement's ramshackle boyhood home in Arkansas only to find its current inhabitants, a poor couple who are probably the Blakes' distant relatives, digging a grave for their baby daughter. Similarly, in the striking incident with which the novel begins, Will's Oscar-night chauffeur drives him to the charred remains of the house where his (the chauffeur's) family burned to death only weeks earlier and displays the finger bones of one of his children.

To be sure, these episodes might arguably be criticized for depending too strongly for their effects on contrivances, on the novelistic equivalent of horror-movie shock tactics. One might carp, too, that Smith doesn't really seem to know his way around L.A. or the film industry: his show biz minutiae invariably feel a bit "off." (Will remembers, for instance, how in the 1970s he introduced Kate, then an aspiring actress, to "the executives at Paramount and Warner and Disney"—yet Disney would probably not, at that time, have been among the first stops on such a studio tour.) There is also the occasional overly melodramatic line ("From across the valley of our lives," Will notes in one unfortunate sentence, "the bugles of warning call to us")—hardly a surprise in a book pitched, as this one is, at such a level of passionate intensity. It might even be complained that American novelists have already exhausted the Hollywood theme, that they have tended to overplay the movie capital's symbolic import, and that their attempts to use stories about movie folk to make big

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thematic points about American life in general are strained and tiresome. Yet such grievances, legitimate though they may be, dissolve in the face of this fresh, harrowing, provocative, and at times ravishing visionary work.

Like *Chimney Rock*, Douglas Hobbie's second novel, *The Day*, begins in a car.[2] A fluke? Not really. These are, after all, intended to be novels about (among other things) the meaning of America, and to many a contemporary novelist there is no more American an image than that of a motorist tooling down the interstate. Nor is this the only similarity between *Chimney Rock* and *The Day*: Hobbie's book also centers on a man's memory of a beloved relative who committed suicide.

That man is Jack Fletcher, a New England architect whose business is suffering the effects of recession. (The year is 1991.) The dead relative is Clare, his sister-in-law, who killed herself a year earlier at age fifty or thereabouts, and who in her last years, routinely absent from holiday gatherings, wrote to no one in the family except for her sister Gwen, Jack's wife. A feminist historian, Clare was an SNCC activist in 1960s Mississippi, then went West to "continu[e] her radicalization" at Berkeley (an act that carries the same thematic weight, for the utterly East-Coast Clare, as Will Blake's going East to attend Columbia). Denied tenure by the St. Louis university at which she taught, Clare insisted that her termination had been prompted not by her failure to complete her dissertation but by "departmental politics." ("ABD meant Anti-establishment Bitches Die, she wrote Gwen.") To quote Peter, Jack's rich brother-in-law and the family's token politically-incorrect type, "that march on Washington, the poor people's shantytown they set up on the mall, Clare was right there, fucking the system." Yet she ended up destroying not the imperialist patriarchy but herself. Sometime after her death, Gwen breaks down: "She's dead. . . . And we let her die."

Meaning what? Presumably that she and Clare's other relatives let down everything that she symbolized—namely, the committed and, yes, unbalanced radicalism that most of them left behind with their love beads and bell-bottoms but to whose essential precepts they still, in good upper-middle-class liberal fashion, tend to pay a rather languid lip service. Gathering on Thanksgiving 1991, a year to the day after Clare's death, her relatives sip wine and listen to the Stones and, amid the family reminiscences and literary chitchat, express their concern about all the things that National Public Radio has told them to be concerned about: Dan Quayle, the legacy of Vietnam, the future of black-white relations, the significance of mass murder in America, Michael Milken.

[2] THE DAY, by *Douglas Hobbie*. Henry Holt. $22.00.

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There are few political arguments in this circle because, whatever the issue may be, all of them (except Peter) can be expected to feel the same way about it and none, in any case, plan to *do* anything about it. No, their role is simply to express their superiority to the jingoistic multitudes by complaining about, say, the Gulf War (during which, we are told, "universal madness reigned, the whole world conspiring, even National Public Radio caught up in the fervor, so the likes of Fletcher, anyone opposed, had to feel a stranger in a strange land") and to make witless jokes *à la* Clare to the effect that CIA stands for "cretins in action" and SDI for "sad dumb initiative." Hobbie records with admirable detachment the sociopolitical lucubrations of these enervated types— who, informed in youth by "the idea of possibility," "set out planning to come into our own someday, to arrive at what we meant, what we want," only to end up smoking grass and grousing about Star Wars.

If Hobbie shares with Charlie Smith a keen awareness of the way in which ungoverned passions can uproot people from rationality and send them spinning toward self-slaughter, his style could not be more different from Smith's: while the prose in *Chimney Rock* mirrors Will's own psychic discombobulation, Hobbie's sentences are nearly maddeningly sane, as if to suggest a psyche once tempted by excess but now, recoiling from the horrible fates of the world's Clares, moored almost too firmly to stability. At times the self-consciously clever party talk is reminiscent of the late Laurie Colwin's taut, terse short stories, but in general this is Updike territory, written about in a direct, carefully detailed, dialogue-heavy style that at times recalls Philip Roth. Interestingly, Roth has contributed a blurb likening the book to *Mrs. Dalloway*—not a bad comparison, for like Virginia Woolf's novel, Hobbie's presents us with a gathering of WASPs who, cocooned in privilege and ennui, are by turns annoying, pathetic, and touching. Like Woolf, Hobbie is sardonic about this cozy, spoiled, self-satisfied little world even as one senses that it is in fact the only one he can fully understand and take seriously. Hobbie, meanwhile, works in several references to *Dubliners*, thereby presumably suggesting a comparison between himself and James Joyce. To be sure, while *The Day*, like *Dubliners*, seeks to plumb both the moral truths of a nation and the eternal verities of human longing and disappointment, there's little in Hobbie's book that prompts comparison with the splendors of Joyce. Yet this small, fine book has its own strengths. Its closing image is one of light amid darkness and birth amid death, its most lingering question one that affirms life's promise even while acknowledging its privations: "What unhappiness," Jack wonders, "had blinded Clare to the possibility looking out from every passing moment?"

Though radically different in setting and spirit from both *Chimney Rock* and *The Day*, Richard Bausch's sixth novel, *Rebel Powers*, also purports to find the state of the Union reflected in the travails of one

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man's family.[3] Or, rather, one boy's: for though Thomas Boudreaux, the book's narrator, is a divorced, middle-aged man who owns a small-town Virginia bookshop, the story Thomas has to tell is about his quarter-century-younger self—a teen-aged, Vietnam-era Air Force brat whose father, a career officer and war hero, has been dishonorably discharged and locked up for stealing a typewriter. Soon after his father's incarceration, Thomas moves with his mother, Connie, and his younger sister, Lisa, to the small Wyoming town where the military prison is located. There they take up residence in a rooming house, where each endures a somewhat different set of stresses. Connie, who has felt estranged from her husband since his return from Nam, doesn't know whether to stay married to him after his release (he's eligible for parole after six months); Lisa, robbed of her daddy, weeps easily and clings for security to her older brother; for his part, the boy-man Thomas doesn't know any longer how to feel about the straight-arrow military-man father who not long ago persecuted him for his subversive long hair, rock music, and "Flower Power" posters but who is now a disgraced jailbird. Living among strangers, all three feel dislocated; for all of them, the word "home" suddenly seems to have no referent.

Among those strangers is one Penny Holt, whom Connie and her children meet on the train to Wyoming. Penny claims to be on her way to Leavenworth to marry a childhood friend who, coincidentally enough, has been sent to the penitentiary for resisting the draft. Yet soon after the family arrives in Wyoming, Penny, who has developed an attachment to Connie, shows up at their door; immediately moving in, she becomes for Thomas the object of a stock adolescent infatuation. (Bausch seems to be trying to hint that this attachment is autobiographical: on the underside of a bookshelf over his bed, Thomas scrawls "*To Penny with all my love, Thomas*," and in the mornings stares at the words, "dreaming of somehow someday doing something or producing something which I could inscribe in that way." When one flips back to the book's dedication, one discovers that it reads "*For Karen, with all my love.*" Yet the crush, real or not, is the stalest thing in the book.) If *The Day*, then, examines a middle-aged man's thoughts about his dead sister-in-law, *Rebel Powers* is a meditation on two people who have long since slipped out of the fortyish Thomas Boudreaux's life: his father and his teenage inamorata.

Bausch is not a flashy writer. In comparison with the rhapsodic torrents of a Charlie Smith or the mannered tautness of a Douglas Hobbie, his style here seems at first supremely conventional, perhaps even no more than serviceable; he never shifts gears, never throws off a line of ecstatic poetry or a terse, unforgettable *mot*. Yet his low-key, well-made prose grows on you. There's an earnestness, an attentive-

[3] REBEL POWERS, by *Richard Bausch*. Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence. $21.95.

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ness to it, and a temperate quality that suggests all good things: intelligence, reflectiveness, moral awareness, common sense, emotional balance. Thomas' voice never feels false, hyperbolic, self-indulgent; his narrative never seems to be wandering off in the wrong direction. There is, rather, a wonderful transparency to Bausch's writing: with rare exceptions, the story feels entirely real and affecting. Particulars of a sort that often seem arbitrary in other novels here reinforce one another and gradually build up a vivid, poignant picture of Thomas' world.

Some years ago, reviewing Bausch's fourth novel, *Mr. Field's Daughter*, I described it as "a study—deeply felt but thoroughly unsentimental—of the elaborate web of emotions that constitutes a family." This description applies equally well to *Rebel Powers*. The principal characters here are marvelously nuanced. Another novelist might have made Connie blindly loyal to her husband or bitterly resentful; Bausch's Connie is a complicated woman who wavers believably between strength and weakness, certitude and bewilderment, a determination to stay and a desire to run. Similarly, Thomas' feelings toward his dad are a rich mixture of pity, love, anger, and embarrassment; his response to the discovery of his mother, moreover, in what may or may not be a lesbian relationship with Penny (shades of Will Blake!) is scrupulously rendered. Boudreaux himself, though absent for long stretches of the book, may be the most finely drawn character of all: at first unlikeable because of his arrogance and petty tyranny, he earns our compassion when he emerges from the brig a broken man, our admiration when he decides to stop feeling self-pity and take hold of his life, and our empathy when, having bungled that effort and incited a climactic donnybrook (this novel, like *Chimney Rock*, features a last-act father-son fistfight), he lights out for the territory. Throughout all these transformations, he remains fully credible and increasingly three-dimensional.

Rebel Powers is thematically concerned not only with Thomas and Lisa and their parents, of course, but also with Vietnam-era America. If the Boudreaux are a family in crisis, late-sixties America is a nation in crisis—in Bausch's words, "a country which was at war with itself." Yet the novel never threatens to become a political tract; for the most part, Bausch doesn't push the parallel too far or allow it to overwhelm the delicately shaded story of Thomas and his family. The one exception comes near the novel's end, when the aforementioned donnybrook takes place on the night of Robert Kennedy's assassination. Yet this contrivance represents a rare exception in an elegant, meticulous book that grows in one's estimation as one reads it and continues to do so after one has set it down.

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JOHN VAN KIRK

Fiction Chronicle

"SOME PEOPLE DIDN'T KNOW ENOUGH TO DROP DEAD," thinks Tom Glover, the self-described "dried-up, deaf old codger" who is the central character of Beverly Coyle's *In Troubled Waters*, and this theme runs through the book like the last remaining Florida panthers, now fitted with electronic collars, lingering on in the everglades as rangers monitor their movements.[1] Glover, at ninety-one, having lived much longer than he'd planned to, finds himself the babysitter of his sixty-year-old son-in-law, Paul, who is in "the middle of the middle stage" of Alzheimer's. The old man is a meticulous and unsentimental observer of his own and Paul's conditions, and he develops a kind of admiration for the younger man who, having lost everything, manages to hold on to his dignity. Petey, Glover's great-grandson, also sees Paul's dignity, imagining him to have suffered massive injuries, like Robocop, and to be unable to gain access to his memories. Coyle's ability to show us Paul's condition from the points of view of these two people more than eighty years apart in age is one of the masterful strokes of this novel, a rich meditation on time and age and what Petey wonderfully misconstrues as "moral history."

In Troubled Waters is plotted according to Glover's observation that "history never repeats itself, it just rhymes," and in this case present events rhyme with the old man's memories of a boy called Lucky Apple, who, though he died more than seventy years ago, and died young, still lived a few agonizing days too long. When Tom Glover decides to hire a couple of local boys—one black and one white—to take Paul fishing, the unexpected consequences of this project carry the novel to its climax with surprising inevitability, revealing the racial tension that lives on in the middle-class suburb that has grown up around Tom Glover's old house. "You know," Glover eventually says to his neighbors, "I never was much of a progressive until you people came along and made me look like one. I ought to thank you. I would have died the biggest bigot on the lake if it weren't for you folks." *In Troubled Waters* is a sharp-eyed rendering of a cloudy century in what we call the "sun belt"; it deserves praise for all that it takes on, and all that it delivers.

Old man Glover gets around stiffly with the aid of two canes. Jack Schiff, the handicapped protagonist of Stanley Elkin's "Her Sense of

[1] IN TROUBLED WATERS, by *Beverly Coyle*. Ticknor & Fields. $19.95.

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Timing," the first of three novellas in *Van Gogh's Room at Arles*, alternates between a walker and a wheelchair.[2] Opening on the day Schiff's wife, on whom he is almost completely dependent, leaves him, this story recounts his trials with the everyday business that most of us think nothing of. For Schiff, a professor of political geography who is himself "outside all the beltways of compassion and the committed heart," even urinating is an effort, and getting from one floor of his house to the other almost a picaresque adventure. This would be depressing stuff indeed if it weren't for Elkin's immense humor and dazzling prose. This story abounds in sentences that at once seem the authentically spontaneous inner thoughts of the character and elegantly composed writing. No living writer exploits the American idiom as well.

The second of these three novellas, however, is written in another idiom altogether, as if to demonstrate that Elkin can do as much with British English as he can with American. Certainly he can, but so reflexive is this story, so much about its own telling, about its own language, that its putative subject—an English commoner's affair with a Crown Prince—is lost in the froth.

But in the title novella Elkin is back in his métier. "Van Gogh's Room at Arles" portrays an Indiana community college professor named Miller who has received a foundation grant to work on a project at a kind of genius colony in the south of France, and who finds himself lodged in the very room where Van Gogh stayed, and which he famously painted. Not remotely as accomplished as his fellow colonists, Miller is overwhelmed:

> He recognized the names of people whose important, newsworthy op-ed columns he thought he had read in the *Times*. Certain faces were vaguely familiar to him from television news shows during times of national and international crises, think tankers with gossip and expertise whose opinions were sought.

Miller, in the presence of such genius, is rather stunned into inanition than inspired, and his struggle with his own sense of mediocrity is honestly, movingly set forth.

Anita Brookner's new novel takes not Genius but Virtue as its subject.[3] *Fraud* is the story of a virtuous woman—a woman who has basically spent all her youth caring for her mother. Anna Durant, now in her middle fifties, has disappeared, and *Fraud* opens like a mystery—with a nod to Simenon—leading the reader to expect the conventions of that genre (and to expect an altogether different kind of fraud). But then the novel turns in another direction entirely; the

[2] VAN GOGH'S ROOM AT ARLES, by *Stanley Elkin*. Hyperion. $22.95.
[3] FRAUD, by *Anita Brookner*. Random House. $21.00.

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police inspectors are forgotten, and a careful study of character and psychology addresses the question whether Anna has wasted her life. This is a novel about miscommunication, missed connections, and the ways in which people make use of one another, out of necessity, out of laziness, and out of sheer habit. It is also a novel about the sort of forgotten person rarely featured in a work of fiction, and there is a quiet authority in every word.

At the end of *Fraud* we may wonder whether Anna's life of compromise and service is really any kind of life at all. We ask no such questions at the end of Barbara Anderson's *Portrait of the Artist's Wife.*[4] The artist's wife of the title, Sarah Tandy, is herself an artist and has had to fight for her art ever since—pregnant at seventeen—she lost her chance at art school.

We first meet Sarah at the posthumous launching of the last book by her husband, Jack Macalister. On its cover is one of her paintings:

> The painting depicted a small flat-roofed bach of vertical weather boards painted with what look like used engine oil. A spray of red-tongued flax-flowers brushed against a faded green water tank set on a rickety stand. The two small windows of the bach reflected a bleached sky. Seed heads and stalks of long grasses, dead daisies and flattened kikuyu grass were depicted with precision.

This is a self-portrait, Sarah says, "a portrait of the artist's wife." "Their marriage was a disaster, of course," someone says at the reception.

The opening scenes of this novel are rough going, many characters are introduced in a short space of time, there are lines and lines of unattributed dialogue, and flashbacks nest within other flashbacks like the layers of an artichoke; but once the book settles down to a straight chronological account of Sarah and Jack's life together, from childhood to his death at fifty-one, its pleasures far outweigh the work of getting through the first thirty pages or so.

Portrait of the Artist's Wife focuses as much on the day-to-day struggle to make ends meet, raise children, and get along with friends and relatives, as on the story of the artistic development of its protagonists. Anderson is unflinching in her depiction of squalling babies, affairs, and recriminations. She also has a great love of the local speech of her native New Zealand, where most of this novel is set. If her fictional novelist, Jack Macalister, captures the life and speech of New Zealand as well as Anderson does, he deserves the accolades he eventually receives for his work.

Almost the opposites of the driven artists in *Portrait of the Artist's Wife* are scholarly writer Margaret Nathan and her academic husband

[4] PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S WIFE, by *Barbara Anderson.* Norton. $21.95.

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Edward in Cathleen Schine's *Rameau's Niece*.[5] Margaret's Ph.D. thesis in the History of Ideas is an accidental bestseller "reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* as 'an unusually accessible, one might even say readable, work of scholarship. . . .'" Her new work is a translation of an unpublished eighteenth-century manuscript called "Rameau's Niece," a curious assemblage of plagiarized philosophy and euphemistic smut, generous passages of which are excerpted in the novel. As if this weren't funny enough, Margaret Nathan is an unlikely scholar with a memory like a sponge, a quick study who can soak up vast amounts of material and then forget it as completely as the squeezed sponge lets go of its water: "information never lingered for long in her mind, but every fact, all knowledge, was welcome for a visit."

Rameau's Niece lampoons the world of academic scholarship and criticism and the life of the New York literati with hilarious and canny accuracy, as in this scene between Margaret and Lily, a colleague of her professor husband:

> "The library," Lily said softly, "is one of the mechanisms of discipline, capturing the individual in a system of registration and accumulation of documents."
>
> The way she said it, Margaret thought, in her throaty whisper, sucking on one dainty finger, she made the library sound like soft-core bondage. Oh! Discipline me with your mechanism! More, oh, more!
>
> "So what are you working on?" Margaret asked, not sure how else to respond to Dewey Decimal de Sade.
>
> "I'm thinking of writing something about music, for a change. Rachmaninoff," Lily said.
>
> Margaret sighed. Poor Rachmaninoff. What crime had he committed to cause him to fall prey to this pretentious sexpot fraud?
>
> "He's not a woman," Margaret said. "Is he?"
>
> "Ah, but he might just as well have been a woman," Lily said tenderly. "Poor Rachmaninoff."
>
> "You *like* Rachmaninoff?" She herself loved Rachmaninoff but saw no reason to tell anyone about it.
>
> "Look," Lily said, "a case must be made for the second tier. Genius is an oppressive male construct. Genius, genius, genius. Enough with the genius."
>
> "You like Rachmaninoff because he's *second-rate*?"
>
> Lily smiled and began to hum loudly a particularly lush passage from the Symphonic Dances.
>
> Margaret, though sorely tempted, forced herself not to sing

[5] RAMEAU'S NIECE, by *Cathleen Schine*. Ticknor & Fields. $19.95.

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along. One had one's pride. But she did regard Lily with a new respect and with a growing warmth.

"Do you like Trollope, too?" she asked hopefully.

The reader sees, though Margaret fails to see, that she is doomed to live the novel she is immersing herself in, and we follow her through her infatuations with a man she meets on a plane, her dentist, and even Lily, laughing all the way.

We follow Jeanette Winterson's unnamed narrator through a series of infatuations, too, but there is a difference. Slightly less than half way through *Written on the Body*, one of the narrator's lovers remarks, "When I saw you . . . I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen."[6] This is the closest we get to a description of the person behind the voice that carries us along, and it pointedly does not tell us whether we are looking at a man or a woman, and that is this book's principal conceit, its greatest weakness, and perhaps its strength.

Rightly or wrongly, readers, unless given other information early on, tend to assume that a first-person narrator shares the sex of the author, yet only a few pages into Winterson's novel, I was ready to give up the feeling that this was a woman speaking for the sense that I was reading the story of a man's amours with a string of mostly married women. Further in, I went back to believing that the speaker was a woman after all, and came away convinced that Winterson was trying to write a book in which the sex of the narrator ultimately wouldn't matter, since the book is about love, and it is after all prudish to quibble about real love wherever it is found. But that won't wash, because this is a book about sex, too, a book that comes close to equating sexual obsession with love, and that certainly gains much of its force from its powerful passages on medicine and anatomy—the geography of the lover's body.

For all its obfuscation, *Written on the Body* is simply and elegantly written. From the beginning it sets as one of its tasks the problem of speaking about love without getting lost in cliché, and Winterson succeeds in putting new life into tired phrases. The question remains, however, whether an entire novel can hang on a trick point of view.

Native, by William Haywood Henderson, also opens with a trick point of view, that of a Pronghorn antelope, but it lasts only for two italicized pages of prologue.[7] From the first page of the novel proper it is clear that the first-person narrator, Blue, is a man, and it is clear that he has a sensibility that sets him apart from the people who surround him in the unnamed Wyoming town where he lives and works. Blue is every bit the classic Western hero; laconic and cool, he

[6] WRITTEN ON THE BODY, by *Jeanette Winterson.* Knopf. $20.00.
[7] NATIVE, by *William Haywood Henderson.* Dutton. $20.00.

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A SELECT **HUDSON REVIEW** PUBLICATION

Poems by Ghalib

translated by
AIJAZ AHMAD
with
WILLIAM STAFFORD
and
ADRIENNE RICH
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AIJAZ AHMAD

This vintage **Hudson Review** publication of 20 ghazals by renowned Urdu poet Ghalib marked the Ghalib Centennial Year, 1969–70. This book of noted translations by William Stafford and Adrienne Rich is available in its original edition for $2. ORDER NOW!

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can hold his own in a fist fight, runs the Fisher ranch with quiet efficiency, understands horses and cattle, and knows how to survive in the wild. But in this book his deepening attachment to a young ranch hand, and his strange relationship with the simultaneously solicitous and menacing Gilbert, a Native American who considers himself "a sort of male squaw," place Blue in terrible jeopardy in the very country that he calls home. *Native* is a powerful story that moves with terrifying momentum towards pain and violence.

Henderson at his best writes well, and some passages that take place in the back country read like vintage Hemingway, only more honest, more exposed. Unfortunately he does not write at that level all of the time, and parts of this novel suffer from awkwardness and overwriting—the aforementioned antelope passage is a case in point. Still, this is an original novel, a stereotype-shattering vision of the American West and its people.

Native gets a large part of its power from the heroic landscape in which it takes place, a landscape both familiar and strange, impressive always, and clearly located on the map and in the American psyche. Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* is set in no such clear place, but in a kind of generic suburb which might be located almost anywhere in the United States.[8] Not only does Eugenides decline to identify his suburb, he declines to particularize his narrator, presenting his story as a report assembled by a group of men who were adolescent boys at the time of the events reported. This technique, which might be annoying if it were not so well accomplished, sets this work apart from the kind of coming-of-age story that a first-person or even a third-person-central narrator would have caused it to be. As it is, *The Virgin Suicides* moves with wit and sadness, and a kind of mysterious music through the sequential suicides of the five Lisbon sisters, a series of events so powerful that they move even a pack of adolescent suburban boys to serious wonderment and haunt them long into adulthood. The passage that follows is from the opening pages:

> On the morning the last Lisbon daughter took her turn at suicide—it was Mary this time, and sleeping pills, like Therese—the two paramedics arrived at the house knowing exactly where the knife drawer was, and the gas oven, and the beam in the basement from which it was possible to tie a rope. They got out of the EMS truck, as usual moving much too slowly in our opinion, and the fat one said under his breath, "This ain't TV, folks, this is how fast we go." He was carrying the heavy respirator and cardiac unit past the bushes that had grown monstrous and over the erupting lawn, tame and immaculate thirteen months earlier when the trouble began.
>
> Cecilia, the youngest, only thirteen, had gone first, slitting her

[8] THE VIRGIN SUICIDES, by *Jeffrey Eugenides*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $18.00.

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> wrists like a Stoic while taking a bath, and when they found her, afloat in her pink pool, with the yellow eyes of someone possessed and her small body giving off the odor of a mature woman, the paramedics had been so frightened by her tranquility that they had stood mesmerized . . .
>
> That was in June, fish-fly season. . . .

The novel is rich in detail—the music played, the high school classes taken, clothes worn—and yet for all its particulars, it is the presentation of collectives in which individuals are lost that makes this novel unique and memorable. The narrators form such a collective, and their opposite numbers, the Lisbon sisters, form another. There is this observation of Cecilia's diary:

> [She] writes of her sisters and herself as a single entity, it's often difficult to identify which sister she's talking about, and many strange sentences conjure in the reader's mind an image of a mythical creature with ten legs and five heads, lying in bed eating junk food, or suffering visits from affectionate aunts.

Most of the action of this book takes place during the thirteen months between Cecilia's bathtub wrist-slitting and the last death, and Eugenides manages to paint in vivid colors the blurry existence of what might be called typical American teenagers. We wait for the final visit from the paramedics, knowing that it will come, knowing from page one that all of these girls will die, knowing that we probably will never fully understand why, and we come away just as haunted as the boys who lived across the street, went to the same high school, talked to the girls on the phone, tumbled with them in the back seats of cars, and watched them fade away.

The Virgin Suicides is a dead-on portrait of our times, a sad and touching book, pulsing softly with brilliance and grief.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

KAREN WILKIN is curator of the exhibition "The Drawings of Stuart Davis: The Amazing Continuity," touring U.S. museums 1993–94. . . . CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK is a Senior Lecturer at Williams College. Her most recent book is *Rejoining the Common Reader* (Northwestern University Press). . . . LAURENCE LIEBERMAN's *New and Selected Poems* is due this fall from the University of Illinois Press. BARBARA KRAFT* has reported for *Time* magazine, *USA Today*, and other national publications. She is currently working on an epistolary novel, "From Los Angeles to Hamburg, With Love." . . . W.S. MERWIN's latest book of poems, *Travels*, was published by Alfred A. Knopf this year. . . . BRUCE BEASLEY's poem in this issue is from his second collection, *The Creation*, which won the Ohio State University Press/The Journal Award and will be published in January 1994. . . . "House of Health" is the title story of STEVE YARBROUGH's forthcoming collection to be published by the University of Missouri Press. . . . HAROLD FROMM, a frequent *HR* contributor, is on the advisory board of a new organization called ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) and is also an editorial consultant for a new journal, ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment).

JOHN LOUGHERY edited *First Sightings: Contemporary Stories of American Youth*, recently published by Persea Books. . . . BERT CARDULLO is the author of *Film Chronicle: Critical Dispatches From a Forward Observer, 1987–1992*, just published by Peter Lang. . . . MARCIA B. SIEGEL chaired the 1993 Dance Critics Association conference at Lincoln Center in June. Titled "Moving Across Words," the conference explored the common ground between dancers and dance writers. . . . EMILY GROSHOLZ was recently promoted to Professor of Philosophy at Penn State University. Her latest book of poems is *Eden* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). . . . FELIX STEFANILE's tenth volume of poetry, *The Dance at St. Gabriel's*, will be published by Story Line Press in 1994. . . . THOMAS FILBIN,* a lawyer by training, is a free lance critic who lives in Massachusetts. . . . BRUCE BAWER is the author of three books published in 1993: *The Aspect of Eternity: Essays* (Graywolf Press), *Coast to Coast* (Story Line Press), and *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (Poseidon Press/Simon & Schuster). . . . JOHN VAN KIRK's first published story, "Newark Job" (*The Hudson Review*, Winter 1992), was included in *Prize Stories 1993: The O. Henry Awards*.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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IN THIS ISSUE:

It is that vital liquidity which is in constant need of defense, and sometimes of rescue—the life of books, of words, of ideas, combining and recombining in fluidity and freedom. What Rushdie's tale hints to Zafar is the same thing Milton's oration tells the Parliament of England. The living ocean of notions, for dictators, is an ocean of trouble.

—Clara Claiborne Park, "Horse and Sea Horse: *Areopagitica* and the Sea of Stories," p. 451.

That last year he shuffled between his old-fashioned, high-set, walnut-dark bed, the desk at its foot, the Ping-Pong table in the lanai on which he now painted, a more sedentary kind of play for an octogenarian, and the dining table, in fact, a redwood picnic table covered with a cloth. This was where he held court every evening attired in his bathrobe, plaid or blue terry cloth, pajamas, fluffy white bedroom slippers and white socks. He was a tough old bird, rather like a turkey, with his croaky voice, heavily veined, creped hands, parchment-thin skin, wattled throat and indomitable, naked head.

—Barbara Kraft, "Last Days of Henry Miller," p. 477.

May of 1968 in France seems to have been the cataclysmic event that blew the lid off the boiling kettle. Foucault himself, up until then behaving like a rather conventional professor type, could now be seen dropping bricks on the heads of policemen from his position atop the barricades. But his more effective bricks turned out to be ideological, and his writing, however skewed, happened to be ready-to-hand for an era of social revolution.

—Harold Fromm, "Scholarship as Opera: Foucault's Woodnotes Wilde," p. 513.

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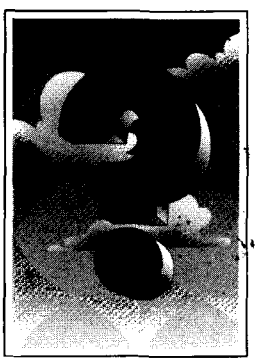
PERHAPS THE ONLY UNIVERSITY THAT REALIZES MOST 18 YEAR-OLDS HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THEY WANT TO DO WITH THEIR LIVES.



Most 8 or 9 year-olds know exactly what they want to be when they grow up. Most 17 or 18 year-olds don't.

And that, as we at Adelphi University see it, is as it should be.

We offer 17 and 18 year-olds a rather (for this day and age) unusual kind of college experience; one that, in the words of our president, Dr. Peter Diamandopoulos, "provides students with the learning necessary to reflect sensitively and judiciously on their place and their possibilities in the world."

Or as W.E.B. Du Bois (himself a graduate of Harvard, the Adelphi of Massachusetts) once put it, "the purpose of education is not to make men carpenters, but to make carpenters men." Substitute "lawyers" or "bankers" for "carpenters," and you get the idea.

ADELPHI UNIVERSITY Garden City, NY 11530. To arrange a tour, call 1-800-ADELPHI.

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